



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**THE MAOIST MOVEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON THE  
DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION OF NEPAL**

by

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March 2015

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## **ABSTRACT**

Nepal's age-old ethnic grievances created a platform for the Maoists to launch their political strategy into broad sections of Nepalese society. The explicit politicization of ethnic grievances helped propel the party to victory in Nepal's first constitutional election in 2008. Soon thereafter, however, the Maoists lost the lead role in Nepalese politics, in no small part because they failed to deliver on their ethnic promises.

This thesis examines the rise and fall of the Maoists in Nepal, as well as the sources and context of the ethnic grievances that have simmered in the country throughout its modern political history. It finds that genuine reform has collided with (and frequently lost out to) the short-term agitations of power politics across the partisan spectrum. In this context, the present thesis establishes a framework to understand the role of ideas in democratizing states. The clash between ideas and ideology on the matter of ethnic grievances sheds light on how the Maoists failed to convert the claims of their movement into the actions of their party in government.

The lesson for the remaining parties is clear: resolving Nepal's ethnic tensions is a matter of ongoing urgency in the country's democratization.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

CPN (M)	Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
NC	Nepali Congress
CPN	Communist Party of Nepal
NPP	Nepal Praja Parishad
UDP	United Democratic Party
PM	Prajatantrik Mahashaba
ULF	United Left Front
UNPM	United National People's Movement
CPN (UML)	Communist Party of Nepal Unified Marxist Leninist
UPFN	Unified People's Front Nepal
NFDIN	National Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities
CPN (UC)	Communist Party of Nepal (United Centre)

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Maoist insurgency in Nepal had many underlying reasons. However, as Deepak Thapa explains, the tendency of Nepal's elite classes and ruling regime to overlook or underplay the genuine problems of the people certainly marked a key factor in escalating the insurgency.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, the Maoist party in Nepal gathered followers during and after the civil war (1996–2006), in part on the promise of democracy and a Maoist solution to ethnic differences in the country. This vision resonated with wide swathes of society. During the height of its popularity, the Maoist Party won 220 seats in the first constituent election held in 2008.

The party's failure to resolve ethnic grievances contributed significantly to its defeat in the 2013 elections. Today, it is the third-largest party in the Constituent Assembly (CA) with 80 seats—140 fewer seats than they had won in the first constituent assembly election. The Maoists can claim to have effected or co-authored some lasting and important changes in Nepal, but their larger role in the country's democratic transition remains unclear.

The Maoists' vow to promote better representation of the poor farmers and to champion all Nepal's downtrodden groups earned them popular support among the marginalized people. That is to say that the Maoists were able to use the ethnic grievances of the people to achieve their political gains. However, when Maoists themselves were in power, they made less effort to address issues related to ethnic grievances, confronted with the practical exigencies of running a battered state just emerging from civil conflict on the one hand and, on the other, reverting to policy preferences more in accord with their core ideology, which did not share such broad support. From the citizens' perspective, the Maoists in power seemed not much different from any other political party, particularly in regard to ethnic grievances. The rise in popular disenchantment with the Maoists coincided with the decline in the party's political fortunes—and still the ethnic problems remain largely unaddressed.

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<sup>1</sup> Deepak Thapa and Bandita Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege: Nepal's Maoist Insurgency, 1996 to 2003* (Kathmandu: The Printhouse, 2003), 97.

## **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

How did the Maoists use ethnic grievances to achieve their shorter-term political goal of attaining power but then fall into a mismatch between ideology, ideas, political practice, and popular aspiration about ethnic grievances that has cost the Maoists their leadership role in Nepali politics today? And what are the implications for Nepal's democratic transition?

## **B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

The research question explores not only the Maoists' use of ethnic grievances to attain political goals but also the related aspects of democratic transitions that were never completely functional in Nepal. According to Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, in democracy, the relationship between "rulers and the ruled" must be smooth.<sup>2</sup> So far, Nepalese politics has not achieved this state, even after its most recent transition.

They go on to say that successful democracy involves democratic consolidation, a situation where a "majority rule to protect minority rights,"<sup>3</sup> is *sine qua non*. The role of political parties in democracy is significant and the even distribution of power across different branches of the system is another important feature of democracy. For these reasons, the earlier democratic experiments have gone down in history as incomplete, at best. Bishnu Raj Upreti notes that as party politics started to overshadow the national politics of Nepal after 1990, "social exclusion, acute inequalities, absolute poverty, and failure of political structures to address these issues"<sup>4</sup> pushed Nepal into further uncertainty. The prospect of democratic consolidation, Leonardo Morlino argues, asserts itself "the process by which the democratic regime is strengthened,"<sup>5</sup> was at its ebb even

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<sup>2</sup> Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, "What Democracy Is ... And Is Not," in *Transition to Democracy: Comparative Perspectives from Southern Europe, Latin America and Eastern Europe*, ed. Geoffrey Pridham (Brookfield, VT: Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1995), 76.

<sup>3</sup> Schmitter and Karl, "What Democracy Is," 79.

<sup>4</sup> Bishnu Raj Upreti, *Political Change and Challenges of Nepal vol. 2: Reflection on Armed Conflict, Peace Process and State Building* (Saarbrücken, Germany: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010), 13.

<sup>5</sup> Leonardo Morlino, "Democratic Consolidation: Definition and Models," in *Transition to Democracy: Comparative Perspectives from Southern Europe, Latin America and Eastern Europe*, ed. Geoffrey Pridham (Brookfield, VT: Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1995), 573.

after 1990s, as party politics with their specific agendas dominated the national agenda to the exclusion of new and difficult popular priorities. The Maoist insurgency was a product of this situation.

The present research seeks to establish a framework to understand the role of ideas in democratizing states as they reflect different parties' manifestos and representatives. Ideas and ideologies buoyed the Maoists in their early days in Nepal, and at least to some extent, the clash between ideas and ideology on the matter of ethnic grievances sheds light on how the Maoists failed to convert the claims of their movement into the actions of their party in government.

These issues are of interest in the broader context of democratic consolidation, particularly in South Asia because the issue of "social organizations such as caste and ethnic and religious communities,"<sup>6</sup> according to Maya Chadda has always been dominant in the political system of many South Asian nations. Nepal is not an exception to this trend.

### **C. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The history of modern Nepal begins in 1768–1769. Marie Lecomte-Tilouine describes King Prithvi Narayan Shah's vision: "a real Hindu Kingdom for the four classes ... and for the 36 castes."<sup>7</sup> All social, ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural divisions were to give way to this new unifying order. Tilouine goes on to say that the notion of these social striations, somehow united under one flag, prevailed in Nepal through the first democracy in 1950–1960 and on until 1990, when social upheaval, under the banner of the People's Movement, successfully pressed for a multiparty government and, more specifically, a new Nepalese constitution.<sup>8</sup> However, according to

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<sup>6</sup> Maya Chadda, *Building Democracy in South Asia: India, Nepal, Pakistan* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, *Hindu Kingship, Ethnic Revival, and Maoist Rebellion in Nepal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 82.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Tilouine, this document also defined Nepal as “a multiethnic, multilingual, democratic, free, indivisible, sovereign, Hindu Kingdom ruled by constitutional monarchy.”<sup>9</sup>

The people of Nepal expected that with the restoration of democracy in the 1990s, the conventions of state discrimination based on religion, ethnicity, and language would end. Susan Hangen points out that politicians paid lip service<sup>10</sup> to this ideal with words like “multiethnic” and “multilingual,” which, according to Deepak Thapa, did not put an end to state discrimination.<sup>11</sup> Thapa continues that, having aroused but failing to fulfill the desire of people to have “radical social transformation ... after 30 years of authoritarianism,”<sup>12</sup> Nepal’s new rulers faced increasingly unstable politics. He asserts that the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) exploited this turmoil in 1996, and launched their violent armed struggle in the name of revolution and People’s War.<sup>13</sup>

Much research regarding the Maoists in Nepal speaks to the genesis of the movement and details the atrocities, violence, and economic destruction brought by the insurgency. In general, the literature holds that Nepal’s Maoist period marked a “rare exception to the contemporary global trend under which”<sup>14</sup> democratic transitions were the result of a “decline of communism and ascendancy of neo-liberalism,”<sup>15</sup> according to R. Andrew Nickson. He maintains that in Nepal, in contrast, the political “alliance between centrist Nepali Congress party and a grouping of seven communist party”<sup>16</sup> came together to end the monarch’s direct rule in the 1990s and in 2005.

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<sup>9</sup> Lecomte-Tilouine, *Hindu Kingship, Ethnic Revival*, 82.

<sup>10</sup> Susan I. Hangen, *The Rise of Ethnic Politics in Nepal: Democracy in the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 22.

<sup>11</sup> Deepak Thapa, “The Making of The Maoist Insurgency” in *Nepal in Transition: From People’s War to Fragile Peace*, eds. Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone, and Suman Pradhan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 48.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> R. Andrew Nickson, “Democratisation and the Growth of Communism in Nepal: A Peruvian Scenario in the Making” in *Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal*, ed. Deepak Thapa (Kathmandu: Martin Chautari, 2003), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

For the most part, the story is told entirely from the political vantage. Rather less of the scholarship focuses on the underlying cultural and social fissures in Nepalese society; as such, ethnic grievances and other such divisions remain under-explored in the relevant literature. This thesis hopes to close this gap. In order to achieve the objective of the paper, this section briefly touches on the salient aspects of the topics, that is, democracy, democratic transitions and democratic consolidation, the democratic transition in Nepal, the Maoist insurgency, and ethnic grievances.

### **1. Democracy, Democratic Transition, and Democratic Consolidation**

According to Ramjee P. Parajulee, the democratization process varies from country to country and also from region to region, depending on “social, economic, political, cultural, and international factors.”<sup>17</sup> In this connection, Chadda posits that the wider domain of democracy in South Asia suggests that it is some sort of “trade-off between territorial consolidation, regime stability and economic growth.”<sup>18</sup> Narayan Khada asserts that Nepal, established as a nation state in 1769, had to struggle to keep its independence and maintain internal cohesion, as well, amid the infighting between different interest groups within the palace.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, the book *Building Democracy in South Asia* by Maya Chadda notes that Nepal’s democracy, from its initial stage in 1950s, started struggling to consolidate and balance fights among three groups: the palace, the political parties, and the traditional elite class.<sup>20</sup> Chadda writes that each group was more interested in ganging up against one another to become powerful, which he compares to Machiavelli’s principle of “divide and conquer.”<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, these early reformers mostly conquered themselves and Nepal’s democracy was set back again.

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<sup>17</sup> Ramjee P. Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal* (Boston: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 7.

<sup>18</sup> Chadda, *Building Democracy in South Asia*, 111.

<sup>19</sup> Narayan Khadka, “Crisis in Nepal’s Partyless Panchayat System: The Case for More Democracy” in *Pacific Affairs* 59, no. 3 (Autumn, 1986): 429, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2758328>.

<sup>20</sup> Chadda, *Building Democracy in South Asia*, 54.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Schmitter and Karl note that democracy encompasses many institutions that are shaped by particular countries' "socioeconomic conditions as well as its entrenched state structures and policy practices."<sup>22</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, in his book *The Third Wave*, asserts that "as a form of government, democracy has been defined in terms of sources of authority for government, purposes served by government, and procedures for constitution[al] government."<sup>23</sup> Likewise, Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl in *What Democracy Is* explain democracy as a "system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives."<sup>24</sup> These two definitions have one thing in common—the legitimacy of the government and its accountability to its people.

Even though the basic norms of democracy remain the same in all democratic countries, Joseph T. Siegle, Michael M. Weinstein, and Morton H. Halperin reveal that some states, which have come more recently to democratization, particularly poor countries, prefer the notion of "development first, democracy later."<sup>25</sup> To further elucidate this point, they assert that "economic growth creates the necessary preconditions for democracy,"<sup>26</sup> meaning that such growth allows "expanding literacy, creating a secure middle class and nurturing cosmopolitan attitudes,"<sup>27</sup> which play a significant part in democracy. David Beetham maintains that the end of democratic transition is expected to lead to democratic consolidation once the formation of a newly elected government, after a free and fair election, takes place.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Schmitter and Karl, "What Democracy Is," 76.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 6.

<sup>24</sup> Schmitter and Karl, "What Democracy Is," 76.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph T. Siegle, Michael M. Weinstein, and Morton H. Halperin, "Why Democracies Excel," in *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 5 (September–October 2004): 57, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20034067>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> David Beetham, "Conditions for Democratic Consolidation," in *Review of African Political Economy* 21, no. 60 (June 1994): 159, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4006202>.

However, because a transition prompts a country to experience a new set of ideas and habits, transition may take a long time. Dankwart A. Rustov, like other scholars, argues, “one generation is probably the minimum period of transition.”<sup>29</sup> Democratic transition is a time-consuming process. It cannot be achieved just for one specific sector or group of people; rather, it requires the confluence of efforts and “attitudes on the part of politician and of the common citizen.”<sup>30</sup> Because of this reality, if such conditions do not occur, then the country may face severe consequences—as is the case in Nepal. According to Shiva Bahadur Singh, the failure of “successive governments since 1990, to bring genuine democracy and extensive development”<sup>31</sup> eventually created a fertile environment for the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) Maoists to launch their insurgency.

Leonardo Morlino explains that democratic consolidation is “understood as the process of establishing and adapting democratic structures and norms.”<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Larry Diamond points out that especially, for the democratic consolidation of a “fragile or new democracy,”<sup>33</sup> three components are crucial: “democratic deepening, political institutionalization, and regime performance.”<sup>34</sup> Each of these components has its significance in the democratic consolidation process. The democratic deepening makes democracy “accountable, representative and accessible.”<sup>35</sup> Likewise, political institutionalization will employ “common rules and procedures”<sup>36</sup> for every kind of

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<sup>29</sup> Dankwart A. Rustov, “Transition to Democracy toward Dynamic model” in *Transition to Democracy Comparative Perspectives from Southern Europe, Latin America and Eastern Europe*, ed. Geoffrey Pridham (Brookfield, VT: Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1995), 347.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 360.

<sup>31</sup> Shiv Bahadur Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy* (New Delhi: Adhyan Publishers, 2007), 267.

<sup>32</sup> Morlino, “Democratic Consolidation,” 574.

<sup>33</sup> Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy towards Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 74.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 75.

political activity.<sup>37</sup> With that said, political institutionalization and democratic deepening complement any regime's "effective performance."<sup>38</sup>

In the broader understanding, Diamond defines consolidation as the "deep, unquestioned, routinized commitment to democracy and its procedures at the elite and mass levels,"<sup>39</sup> meaning that all the people will "routinely, instinctively conform to the written (and unwritten) rules of the game, even when they conflict and compete intensely."<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, a general belief among the "elites, organizations, and the mass public"<sup>41</sup> in democratic practices is a must for consolidation. Perhaps most helpfully, Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan's five arenas explain the importance of democratic consolidation: a free and lively civil society, a political society, a rule of law, a usable bureaucracy, and an economic society.

*a. A Free and Lively Civil Society*

The essence of civil society relies on the choice of freedom that an individual or specific group will likely endure for their betterment. This liberty of freedom does not fit with the policy of a nondemocratic regime as was the case in South America, and European communist countries.<sup>42</sup> The range of civil society starts from individual or ordinary citizens to the associations and groupings affiliated with various aspects of political as well as "social strata (such as trade unions, entrepreneurial groups, journalists, or lawyers)."<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the voice of an individual becomes stronger only when it makes some space within any specific group, hence the role of free and lively civil society is important for the consolidation of democracy.

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<sup>37</sup> Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 75.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problem of the Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 7.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.



***b. Political Society***

In democracy, it is essential for political stakeholders to have the “legitimate right to exercise control over public power and the state apparatus,”<sup>44</sup> meaning that they are the ultimate decision-makers as they are elected by the people and represent their voices or concerns. The involvement of political society complemented by civic or social society is a must for the consolidation of democracy as civil society alone can overthrow the “nondemocratic regime,”<sup>45</sup> but cannot consolidate it in isolation.<sup>46</sup> On the same note, the civic society that selects and monitors a democratic government must appreciate “democratic political society, political parties, elections, electoral rules, political leadership, interparty alliances and legislatures”<sup>47</sup> as they remain the crucial aspect of democracy and are the bases for democratic consolidation. Failure to achieve this condition could lead the nation to conflict.

***c. Rule of Law***

Rule of law, as one of the paramount components of democracy, is also an integral part of the development of an ideal civil and political society.<sup>48</sup> Democratic consolidation progresses only when all the stakeholders’ persons or institutions in a democratic country will respect and abide by the laws.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, democracy always aspires to function best on constitutional norms, which take precedence over majority-based policies, because constitutional practices encompass the spirit of democracy that would be compatible to many.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Linz and Stepan, *Problem of the Democratic Transition*, 8.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

**d. Usable Bureaucracy**

A democratic government always seeks to have a strong and legitimate bureaucracy that implements, monitors, and delivers service inherent in the government policies so as to meet the demands of people.<sup>51</sup> Such prerequisites for the consolidation of democracy as an “independent civil society, an autonomous political society with consensus of governance and constitution, and rule of law”<sup>52</sup> can only operate if there is a functioning bureaucracy for democratic leaders and a stable economy.<sup>53</sup> If such conditions do not exist, then democracy will be overshadowed by the rising expectations of the people. Therefore, modern democracy requires a “capacity to command, regulate, and extract”<sup>54</sup> resources so as to govern the political system of a particular nation. However, in a newly democratic country, members of the old regime holding key positions in the state bureaucracy tend to be reluctant to deliver services to the people as expected.<sup>55</sup>

**e. Economic Society**

According to Linz and Stepan, democracy cannot be consolidated in either of two extreme conditions: a “command economy and a pure market economy.”<sup>56</sup> They further assert that the strong presence of an economic society, which “mediates between the state and the market,”<sup>57</sup> is required for the consolidation of democracy. Economic society according to them is a set of “socio-politically accepted norms, institutions, and regulation.”<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, they insist that a “socially and politically institutionalized regulated market”<sup>59</sup> is vital for the consolidation of democracy.

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<sup>51</sup> Linz and Stepan, *Problem of the Democratic Transition*, 11.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

This crucial consolidation of democracy is not so easy to achieve. In this regard, Samuel P. Huntington's explanation of the various difficulties that countries might have to face especially during the regime changes outlines problems associated with democratic consolidation. These problems include

establishing new constitutional and electoral system, weeding out proauthoritarian officials and replacing them with democratic ones, repealing or modifying laws that were unsuitable for democracy, abolishing or drastically changing, authoritarian agencies such as the secret police, and, in former one-party system, separating party and government property, functions, and personnel.<sup>60</sup>

Morlino notes that achieving democratic consolidation through a strong regime whether in an authoritarian or a democratic system is tough in the environment where "political instability, corruption, clientelism, inefficient taxation and confusion on [the] hierarchy principle," prevails.<sup>61</sup> Upreti mentions that this situation remained crucial in Nepal's case especially from 1990 to 1996, when "corruption, politicization of the bureaucracy, police force and intelligence"<sup>62</sup> hampered democratic consolidation, and eventually led the nation to face Maoist armed conflict.

## **2. Maoist Insurgency**

The Maoist insurgency of Nepal, which was fought in the name of the people's war, and which, according to Tioluine, "attracted worldwide attention both for its bloody aftermath and its anachronism,"<sup>63</sup> contradicts many doctrinal aspects of Maoism itself. James Chieh Hsiung mentions that Mao Tse Tung is considered as a good "engineer of communism, successfully applying its theory into Chinese reality"<sup>64</sup>—a war-ravaged and impoverished largely agricultural state. According to Hugh Seton-Watson, the Chinese revolutionary struggle was "fought not at the urban center (as in Petrograd in 1917), but

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<sup>60</sup> Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 209.

<sup>61</sup> Morlino, "Democratic Consolidation," 579.

<sup>62</sup> Upreti, *Political Change and Challenges*, 13.

<sup>63</sup> Lecomte-Tilouine, *Hindu Kingship, Ethnic Revival*, 3.

<sup>64</sup> James Chieh Hsiung, *The Logic of Maoism* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 1.

at the rural periphery.”<sup>65</sup> He further says that the Chinese revolution was overwhelmingly joined and mounted by peasants as opposed to the Russian case, where the “working class of Petrograd played a decisive role.”<sup>66</sup> In sum, as Hsiung posits, China’s “own successful national liberation struggle”<sup>67</sup> and its support for the people’s war was unique. Furthermore, Chalmers A. Johnson suggests, in China, Maoists aligned even with the “noncommunist nationalist group”<sup>68</sup> and made a united front with Chiang Kai Shek in 1927 against Japanese colonialism. This development further proves that Maoism included many activities that, says Hsiung, were not “within normal Marxist patterns of actions and institutions.”<sup>69</sup>

Hsiung mentions that out of many theoretical connotations of the People’s War in China, securing support of the masses was the major focus of the communist Party and its army.<sup>70</sup> Thapa asserts that in Nepal’s case, people were not motivated but terrorized by Maoist atrocities. The Maoists blamed other political parties, including the communist parties, for being revisionist and reactionary.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, Nepal’s Maoist insurgency contradicts the nature of the People’s war of China. The Maoist insurgency, as Shantosh B. Poudyal posits, gained momentum not through ideological motives but from social problems that “led to further alienation of the marginalized people.”<sup>72</sup>

### 3. Ethnic Grievances

Donald L. Horowitz, in his *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, notes that in a society where there are many ethnicities, issues related to ethnicity appear in various forms, for

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<sup>65</sup> Seton-Watson Hugh, “The Russian and Chinese Revolutions” *The China Quarterly*, no. 2 (April–June 1960): 45, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/651439>.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 44–45.

<sup>67</sup> Hsiung, *The Logic of Maoism*, 89.

<sup>68</sup> Chalmers A. Johnson, *Autopsy on People’s War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 14.

<sup>69</sup> Hsiung, *The Logic of Maoism*, 1.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>71</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 45.

<sup>72</sup> Shantosh B. Poudyal, “Explaining the Success of Nepal Communist Party—(NCP-M): A Comparison of the Maoist Insurgencies in the 21st Century” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2010), 67.

example, “development plans, educational controversies, trade union affairs, land policy, business policy, tax policy.”<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, Lipset argues that because “effectiveness and legitimacy”<sup>74</sup> remain vital in democracy, if a new political system fails to fulfill the “expectations of major groups (on the grounds of effectiveness) for [a] long enough period to develop legitimacy upon the new basis, a new crisis may develop.”<sup>75</sup> Along this line, if people are pushed to an extreme condition where they feel isolated from the state, at one point in time they tend to lose the “tolerance of opinions,”<sup>76</sup> Lipset maintains. Such a situation makes people vulnerable to exploitation by any specific group or community. This description coincides with Nepal’s case, where the marginalized minorities were not happy with the state even after the restoration of democracy in 1990 and fueled the Maoist insurgency from 1996 to 2006.

#### **D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

I acknowledge that modern Nepal’s path to democratic consolidation has been characterized by many upheavals, whether it was during the 104-year Rana oligarchy, or the 30 years of the party-less *panchayat* system, or the 10 years of the Maoist insurgency. However, I hypothesize that the deeply “entrenched social discrimination”<sup>77</sup> and under-representation of marginalized ethnicities, particularly amid the language and practice of state discrimination, made a favorable environment for the rise of the Maoist insurgency.<sup>78</sup> In light of the Maoists’ declining political popularity, I further hypothesize that Nepal’s democratic progress and stability depends on real and enduring solutions to ethnic grievances, which can only come about with a thorough understanding of how these issues operate in Nepalese history, culture, and politics.

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<sup>73</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 8.

<sup>74</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 65.

<sup>75</sup> Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*, 65.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>77</sup> Upreti, *Political Change and Challenges*, 13.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

## **E. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research incorporates relative dimensions of democracy, Maoist insurgency, and the role of ethnic grievances to augment conflict while establishing the arguments on how Maoists used ethnic grievances to achieve political goals. The thesis begins with the background of democracy and the struggle for consolidation under different regimes (the Rana oligarchy, the *panchayat* system, and the multiparty democracy between 1990 and 2002). This chapter also covers the state of democracy during the Maoist insurgency.

Then the thesis turns to the ethnic grievances that simmered beneath the surface of Nepal's political scene, including how the marginalized ethnic communities were discriminated against on the basis of religion, caste, and language, leaving huge opportunity for social resentment towards the central authority. The same section sheds light on how such resentment serves to elevate conflicts in countries. Then, the thesis examines the use of these ethnic grievances as a tool by the Maoists to achieve their political goals. Also at issue are the ways in which ethnic divisions do and do not accord with Maoist ideology at its core, which may further explain the later disconnect between the leadership and the Maoists' supporters, particularly once the party took the lead of the post-conflict government.

The thesis concludes with some observations, based on the findings of these chapters, on the relevance of these "grass-roots" issues in democratic transition and consolidation and the way forward for Nepal.

## II. DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE IN NEPAL

The democratic struggle in Nepal began when the 200 years of British rule in India ended in 1947. Nepal, the only nation in South Asia not colonized by any country, missed out on the democratizing trends in the region, however. Dilli Raman Regmi states that during this time, when many countries were developing their social, political, and economic life, Nepalese society was overwhelmingly controlled by the “consolidated and integrated feudal force.”<sup>79</sup> Such a ruling system severely affected the country both politically and economically. The prospect of democracy and development in the country was further diminished, and Nepal’s political and developmental spheres were isolated from world affairs for long periods of time.

### A. NEPALESE POLITICS BEFORE 1951

As Nepalese history shows, from the time of its unification in 1769 until 1816, the country was involved in consolidating its territory internally and externally.<sup>80</sup> Internally, many small principalities within Nepal were conquered. Externally, Nepal fought many battles on different fronts with the British East India Company from 1814 to 1816, collectively known as the Anglo-Nepal War.<sup>81</sup> At the same time, Nepal could not establish a firm ruling system within the country because of in-fighting among influential circles within the palace.<sup>82</sup>

Throughout the years (especially before 1951), various rulers failed to promote democracy partly because the country was not exposed to the world and its influences, but also because the rulers were more focused on strengthening their rule than in

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<sup>79</sup> D. R. Regmi, *The Nepali Democratic Struggle: Its Aim and Character* (statement to the Nepali Natinoal [sic] Congress, 1948), 1.

<sup>80</sup> Leo E. Rose and John T. Scholz, *Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980), 16–17.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 22–23.

empowering the people.<sup>83</sup> Nepal's modern history, particularly under Shah and Rana rule, has many political implications in Nepal.

### **1. Shah Rule**

The King of Gorkha, Prithvi Narayan Shah, who continued Nepal's expansion after conquering the Kathmandu Valley, unified Nepal. According to Shiva Bahadur Singh, Nepalese society after the unification of Nepal consisted of "several small, isolated, non-literate and homogeneous groups, whose members tended towards strict conformance to the norms of the folk."<sup>84</sup> The rationale of such a ruling system during this time exemplifies that rather than a democratic governing system, Nepal relied on a traditional ruling system

In Nepal, the Shah and Rana rulers are considered to have enjoyed their rule either backed by religious or by traditional norms rather than by popular consent of the people.<sup>85</sup> Satish Kumar asserts that in order to consolidate their power, the Shah rulers relied on courtiers and four Kajis (Kaji was the title given by monarchs to special castes).<sup>86</sup> They were the king's trusted confidants and acted as a "cabinet collectively responsible to the monarch for the civil and military administration of the country."<sup>87</sup> To keep their hold on the king, the Shah rulers concentrated their efforts on either managing or marginalizing different courtiers within the palace.

The king's trusted courtiers were not elected nor did they represent the people's aspirations; there was no direct communication between the rulers (the kings) and the people. As the courtiers were not accountable to the people, their advice to the king would not incorporate the expectations of the people.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 19–20.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 29–30.

<sup>86</sup> Satish Kumar, "The Nepalese Monarchy from 1769 to 1951," *International Studies* 4, no. 1 (1962): 49, doi:10.1177/002088176200400103.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 52.



However, the Shah rulers alone cannot be blamed for ignoring the democratic claim of the people while ruling the country. Especially after the dawn of Rana oligarchy rule, the political system of Nepal transformed into a hereditary ruling system.<sup>89</sup> This development diminished any prospects for democracy in Nepal.

## **2. Rana Rule**

The Rana dictatorship, which lasted for nearly 104 years (1846 to 1951), is seen in Nepal's history as a major setback for the country's democratic quest. Ramji P. Parajulee posits that the originator and first prime minister of the Rana regime, Jung Bahadur Rana, sought to "consolidate his power by purging hundreds of his opponents and rivals and appointing his brothers and relatives to various key political and military posts."<sup>90</sup> Likewise, Louise Brown mentions that Jung Bahadur and his successors are believed to have controlled the free activities of monarchs and they also directed future monarchs by getting them involved in what she calls "debauchery at an early and impressionable age."<sup>91</sup> The Rana carried out all these activities to keep the monarchs out of politics. In 1847, the Ranas took over executive power in the country, and the Shah kings were treated as mere figureheads.<sup>92</sup>

As Leo E. Rose and John T. Scholz explain, the Rana regime was centered on family politics; they garnered support from the British East India Company in India so that their autocracy could not be opposed by the people inside Nepal.<sup>93</sup> Even if the people would have dared to resist Rana rule, they would have been easily crushed by the rulers, backed by the British East India Company's assistance to the Ranas.<sup>94</sup> The British may have opted to support the Ranas because they were worried that any internal struggles or

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<sup>89</sup> Rose and Scholz, *Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 29–31.

<sup>90</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 32.

<sup>91</sup> Louise Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal* (New York, US: Routledge, 1995), 5.

<sup>92</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 32.

<sup>93</sup> Rose and Scholz, *Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 28–29.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

movement for democracy in Nepal might spill over into India, where people might oppose British rule in India.<sup>95</sup>

Rose and Scholz notes that internally, Ranas were focused on the issue of the succession of the prime minister and severe divisions among themselves as they classified themselves in A, B, and C categories.<sup>96</sup> This division was initiated by the ruling Rana family, which not surprisingly grouped itself into class A (elite); other Ranas fell into class B (medium) and class C (low). This hierarchy was intended to keep the succession for prime ministers only to class A Ranas or the ruling Rana family.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, S. C. Lohani asserts that the reign of the Rana regime and its political ambitions in Nepal are believed to have pioneered feudalism.<sup>98</sup> As a result, the impact of power-centered politics was the hampering of Nepal's economic, social, and political spheres. Hence, all those power-consolidating measures adopted by the Shahs and Rana rulers in Nepal diminished the democratic set of ruling in Nepal.

## **B. BRIEF DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES OF NEPAL**

As Brown highlights, there was no formal education or free political activities during the active rule of the Shahs and, most importantly, during the Rana rule, Nepal was locked in a “time warp from which the country emerged in 1951 totally unprepared to face the modern world.”<sup>99</sup> Hence, as Brown observes, it is often argued that Nepal's democratic foundation was never free from the old ruling system; even if there were democratic movements, they only changed the actors, not the system itself.<sup>100</sup> As a result, the country experienced various forms of unstable political situations even after democracy arrived—briefly—in 1951.

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<sup>95</sup> Rose and Scholz, *Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 30–31.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 31–32.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> S. C. Lohani, “The Birth of Rana Feudalism in Nepal,” *Ancient Nepal* 8 (1989), 49, [http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/ancientnepal/pdf/ancient\\_nepal\\_08\\_07.pdf](http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/ancientnepal/pdf/ancient_nepal_08_07.pdf).

<sup>99</sup> Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy*, 13.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 23–24.

## 1. Political Change and Party Politics

The end of the Rana oligarchy in 1951 opened the door for democratic practices in Nepalese politics. Parajulee maintains that tripartite talks among the King, the Nepali Congress, and the Ranas<sup>101</sup> allowed political change in the country. Similarly, Singh argues that during same time, “King Tribhuvan, accompanied by the important leaders of the Nepali Congress (NC) and its Mukti Sena, reached Kathmandu as the first democratic King of Nepal.”<sup>102</sup> Parajulee assert that even though the tripartite talks were seen as a “Delhi compromise,” as they were brokered by India, the session undoubtedly initiated democratic changes in Nepal.<sup>103</sup> After 1951, three prominent, politically influenced entities emerged in Nepalese politics: the monarchy, the Nepali Congress, and the Ranas. These three entities represented three different interest of the society. Brown notes that the monarchy, sidelined by the Ranas, and with special religious status in Hindu mythology, was able to reclaim its political power in the palace.<sup>104</sup>

Still, the Ranas, who represented a feudal class, could not be totally unseated by the anti-Rana movement; hence, “rather than a revolution,” Brown points out, “Nepal ... experienced a ‘restoration’ accompanied by a reshuffling of the elite.”<sup>105</sup> Thus, the Ranas remained an influential political circle even after their formal rule waned. Likewise, the NC, which led the armed anti-Rana regime, represented the revolutionary motive of the people.<sup>106</sup> With these three political entities representing three specific interests of society, conflicts of interest were bound to arise in the future. To avoid the looming conflict among the main political stakeholders, Parajulee explains that India and King Tribhuvan asked the Ranas and the Nepali Congress to work together.<sup>107</sup> However, such a partnership could not last long.

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<sup>101</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 40.

<sup>102</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 54.

<sup>103</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 40.

<sup>104</sup> Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy*, 23.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>106</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 40.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

The tussle between the Rana rulers and the NC party increased because both parties had different political and social interests. In other words, Nepal's political system was fragmented right from the beginning in regards to its democratic practices.

However, with the dawn of democracy, Nepalese political parties for the first time were freely practicing party politics after 104 years of autocratic rule. With the change of political system in the country, Singh maintains that the NC promoted several political reforms, for example, the "maintenance of law and order, the establishment of Gram Panchayat and spread of education and other welfare programme."<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, Parajulee notes that to lead the country into the path of democracy with a firm set of rules, Nepal passed its first Interim Government Act.<sup>109</sup> This moment marked the initiation of democratic practice in Nepal.

The political parties, especially the NC, were in the limelight as they led the anti-Rana movement. People believed the NC would effect political, social, and economic changes. Bhuwan Chandra Upreti notes that the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), which opposed the Delhi agreement, wanted more reforms implemented in Nepal.<sup>110</sup> In fact, the polarization of the centrist and leftist political ideologue hit Nepalese politics immediately after the country got democracy in 1951.<sup>111</sup> As the political stakeholders during that period, focused on consolidating power, the political situation of the country got worse. Under such circumstances, democratic norms in the country could not be established.

## **2. Palace-Parliament Row**

Although democracy replaced an autocratic Rana regime, and democracy was meant to be the common theme of the king and the Political parties, the reality was not the same. The power-centered politics destabilized the political situation of the country. Political power centers were more determined to solidify their position than to deliver

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<sup>108</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 54.

<sup>109</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 41.

<sup>110</sup> Bhuwan Chandra Upreti, *Maoists in Nepal: From Insurgency to Political Mainstream* (Satyawati Nagar, Delhi, India: Kalpaz, 2008). 15.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 15–16.

democratic services to the people. In such situation as Rose and Scholz notes, there was a row between the palace and the parliament in Nepalese politics.<sup>112</sup> Einsiedel, Malone, and Pradhan illustrate this power play: “The monarchy firmly clawed power back not only from the still entrenched Rana clan but also from the nascent and idealistic political parties.”<sup>113</sup> In addition, as quoted by Parajulee, King Tribhuvan’s declaration of the absolute power of monarchy on February 13, 1954, further asserted the rising political quest of the palace in Nepalese politics:

The inherent sovereignty of the Monarch and his special prerogatives over the executive, legislative and judicial wings as the supreme head have been handed over to us by the tradition and custom of the country. For some time these prerogatives of the Monarch were exercised by the prime ministers by virtue of the rights vested in them by our illustrious forefathers. Since those rights were ended by the proclamation of 18 February 1951, the supreme authority in all affairs now rests in us.<sup>114</sup>

The rift among and within the political parties (most importantly the NC) emboldened the king to strengthen his position.<sup>115</sup> Because of this, according to Einsiedel, Malone, and Pradhan there was a delay in holding an election.<sup>116</sup> This power-centered politics did not allow the people’s genuine problems related to health, education, and development to be solved.

### **3. Nepal’s First Parliamentary Elections**

As democracy was new to the country, the people’s hope in political parties remained strong. Although it took eight years, the Nepalese people’s optimistic belief in democracy was crucial to make the country’s first parliamentary election on February 18, 1959 successful.<sup>117</sup> The election result changed the political equation of the country.

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<sup>112</sup> Rose and Scholz, *Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 46–48.

<sup>113</sup> Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone, and Suman Pradhan, *Nepal in Transition: From People’s War to Fragile Peace* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 6.

<sup>114</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 42.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>116</sup> Einsiedel, Malone, and Pradhan, *Nepal in Transition*, 6.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

Political parties who struggled against the Rana oligarchy were coming into Nepalese politics through the consent of the people. Singh highlights that the NC won an overwhelming majority in the parliament, winning 74 of 109 seats, with the Gorkha Parishad party winning 19, and the Communist Party of Nepal winning only four seats (see Table 1).<sup>118</sup>

Table 1. First Parliamentary Election Result of Nepal 1959<sup>119</sup>

S.N.	Name of Parties	Seats Contested	Seats won	No of votes	PC or %
1	Nepali Congress	108	74	66,6898	37.2
2	Gorkha Parishad	86	19	30,511	17.3
3	Samyukta Prajatantra party	86	5	17,7508	9.9
4	Nepal Communist Party	47	4	12,9142	7.2
5	Praja Parishad (Acharya)	46	2	53,083	2.2
6	Praja Parishad (Misha's)	36	1	59,820	2.3
7	Nepal Tarai Congress	21	0	36,107	2.1
8	Nepal Rastriya Congress	20	0	12,707	0.7
9	Prajatantrik Mahasabha	68	0	59,896	3.3
10	Independents	268	4	29,1149	16.7

Table 1 reveals that in the short span of eight years, many political parties emerged in Nepalese politics. It also hints that for a country like Nepal, it would not have been easy to have a stable political situation with so many political parties and their various agendas. Understandably, the future of democracy in Nepal after the election seemed more challenging.

The election results did not please the king; as Singh recounts, the first elected Prime Minister of Nepal, B.P. Koirala, announced during his election rally that upon his

<sup>118</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 27.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 98.

party's victory in the election he would keep the "crown in the national museum."<sup>120</sup> Amid this tension with the king, and with so many different political parties jockeying for influence, the Nepali Congress government found it hard to implement reforms.<sup>121</sup> Rose and Scholz explains that the NC appointed its own members to a parallel "development bureaucracy" that channeled development funds directly to the districts, bypassing the controls of entrenched central bureaucrats,<sup>122</sup> who mostly were loyal to the palace.

Besides social reforms agenda, according to Rose and Scholz, the NC party after coming to power focused on keeping administrative officials away from the palace.<sup>123</sup> Those moves were initiated in an effort to curtail the intervening role of palace in Nepalese politics and to promote a democratic system in which bureaucrats would be accountable towards the people.<sup>124</sup> Decisions related to social and bureaucratic reforms were not becoming as popular as expected, partly because they were new trends in the old system and mostly because those people who were benefitting from old feudalistic social status for centuries were losing their privileges. Hence, the first democratically elected government of Nepal did not have a smooth governing environment. Parajulee asserts that the government's decision was not liked by powerful groups in society, namely the Ranas, the landlords, and Birta holders (feudal proprietors).<sup>125</sup>

Although the reforms of the government aimed to bring about changes in people's lives, the reforms provoked violence and lawlessness.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, Singh posits that the NC party workers at ground level were also not satisfied with their party center.<sup>127</sup> Three opposition parties—Nepal Praja Parishad (NPP), the united Democratic Party (UDP), and the Prajatantrik Mahashaba (PM)—decided to form a National Democratic Forum.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>121</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 99–103.

<sup>122</sup> Rose and Scholz, *Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 48.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 48–49.

<sup>125</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 41.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>127</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 100.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 99.

Under such circumstances, the first elected government was facing challenges from within and outside the party.

As Singh outlines, using the fluid political situation after Nepal's first parliamentary election, King Mahendra on December 15, 1960, "dismissed the elected government, banned political parties, and deprived the citizens on their fundamental rights and freedom, including the elected Prime Minister B. P. Koirala in prison."<sup>129</sup> With this event, Nepal's first-ever parliamentary election and its brief democratic practices were abruptly ended with a royal takeover in 1960.

### C. DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLES UNDER PARTY-LESS SYSTEM

The party-less Panchayat system imposed by the king in 1960 was a major setback to the democracy of Nepal.<sup>130</sup> Singh writes that there were two years of direct rule from the king before promulgation of a new constitution in 1962.<sup>131</sup> Narayan Khadka asserts that it incorporated "odd but ingenious combination of certain features of the National Guidance Systems of Egypt and Indonesia, [and] the Basic Democracy system in Pakistan."<sup>132</sup> The king, according to Singh, denounced the weakness of party politics and the parliament and he argued that his imposed political system in the country was meant for a suitable political system.<sup>133</sup> The king's new ruling system did not give any space to the opposition, making the system undemocratic. Sumit Ganguly and Brian Shoup maintain that the "four-tiered Panchayat system was little more than a quasi-democratic front meant to boost the legitimacy of monarchy."<sup>134</sup> This arrangement ultimately strengthened the palace power as well.

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<sup>129</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 102.

<sup>130</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 50.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Khadka, "Crisis in Nepal's Partyless Panchayat System," 434.

<sup>133</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 51.

<sup>134</sup> Sumit Ganguly and Brian Shoup, "Nepal: Between Dictatorship and Anarchy," *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 4 (2005): 132, doi:10.1353/jod.2005.0062; <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/jod/summary/v016/16.4ganguly.html>



Although the Panchayat system had a provision of electing its representatives in various tiers of its system, according to Khadka, it could not be counted as a democratic step because it provided an extremely narrow base of popular representation.<sup>135</sup> Moreover, even the elected representatives were not accountable to the people and to the norms of democracy, but rather were loyal to the palace. Ganguly and Shoup go on to say that the king had given discretionary authority to suspend the basic law and take over cabinet posts.<sup>136</sup>

Ganguly and Shoup maintain that the Panchayat system tried to improve the country's overall development by introducing some more land reforms than the NC had tried in the past and by making hill people migrate to the flatland Terai.<sup>137</sup> However, the resentment of people toward the system was at its peak because popular aspirations for democracy were increasing. Furthermore, King Birendra, who succeeded his father King Mahendra in 1972, had been expected to bring some democratic changes. However, no substantial changes in the ruling system materialized.<sup>138</sup>

To make things worse, Nepalese students could not submit to the Pakistan Embassy in Nepal their letters denouncing Pakistan's military rulers' decision to execute democratically elected Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan.<sup>139</sup> The protest was disrupted by police. In response, the students prolonged their protest throughout the nation. Rose and Scholz assert that the protest that was meant to denounce Pakistan's regime decision persuaded the general public, peasants, and professionals of Nepal to join the anti-government movement.<sup>140</sup>

Obviously, irrespective of the agenda or issues, people were waiting for the opportunity to express their growing resentment against the Panchayat system. The

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<sup>135</sup> Khadka, "Crisis in Nepal's Partyless Panchayat System," 434.

<sup>136</sup> Ganguly and Shoup, "Nepal: Between Dictatorship and Anarchy," 132.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Rose and Scholz, *Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 62–63.

<sup>139</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 58.

<sup>140</sup> Rose and Scholz, *Nepal: Profile of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 66.

movement gave impetus to the national political movement. Ultimately, the King announced a public referendum for 1980.<sup>141</sup>

The announcement of a public referendum was welcomed by the political parties also as a move to establish good relations between the palace and the parties.<sup>142</sup> According to Urmila Phadnis, the referendum asked people to “choose between two alternatives—retention of the ‘partyless’ Panchayat system with suitable reforms or a multiparty system of government.”<sup>143</sup> Phadnis continues that King Birendra, educated in the West, was regarded as more liberal than his father, who had dismissed the elected parliament and taken over power.<sup>144</sup> Leaders belonging to both camps—that is, followers of the Panchayat system and followers of democracy—strengthened their positions by attracting people to vote in their favor. A matter of prestige for both sides, the referendum was held with a lot of excitement and supposedly in a democratic way.

In total, 66.9 percent of the population took part.<sup>145</sup> The referendum result went in favor of Panchayat; as Khadka explains, it proclaimed that people wanted to retain the Panchayat system with suitable reforms.<sup>146</sup> While alleging that the Panchayat system used government resources to win the referendum, opposition parties conceded the defeat.<sup>147</sup> Singh asserts that the result of the referendum compelled the king to realize the necessity of making some changes in the governing system of Panchayat after the election.<sup>148</sup> As translated by Singh, the king maintained that ideological differences are natural for the development of democracy and hinted at the necessity of abiding by the decision of a majority alongside respecting the ideas of the minority.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 60.

<sup>143</sup> Urmila Phadnis, “The Politics of Referendum,” *Pacific Affairs* 54, no.3 (Autumn 1981): 439, [www.jstor.org/stable/2756788](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2756788).

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 444.

<sup>146</sup> Khadka, “Crisis in Nepal’s Partyless Panchayat System,” 440.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 144.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

The outcome of the referendum had crucial implications for Nepalese politics. First, according to Phadnis, leaders of the Panchayat system, including the king, for the first time realized that they could not ignore the minority vote.<sup>150</sup> Second, opposition parties were able to figure out their political strength and weakness in the country.<sup>151</sup> Hence, both the king with the governing party and the opposition parties were more focused on consolidating their power than on developing or establishing democracy in the country. As a result, there was a continuation of power-centered politics in the country that had started right after the unification of modern Nepal.<sup>152</sup> Even though the referendum was meant to mend the sour relationship between followers and opponents of the Panchayat system, it only widened the rift between the two sides.<sup>153</sup>

Throughout the 1980s, the ruling party tried to pacify the multiparty supporters. In contrast, the opposition parties (mainly the Nepali Congress and the Communist parties) focused on expanding their influence all over the country, creating a favorable situation for strong opposition to the ruling parties.<sup>154</sup> The country once again saw the power struggle in its top-level politics. As a result, political division further deepened in Nepal, eventually increasing the people's grievances.

Under such circumstances, an underground political movement in the country against the Panchayat system gained momentum.<sup>155</sup> Moreover, people were frustrated by the system. Most importantly, Khadka posits that many newly elected members of Panchayat parliament in 1986 showed their "opposition to the system and wanted change in Panchayat system."<sup>156</sup> In February 1990, the Nepali Congress and the United Left Front (ULF) jointly launched a "United National People's Movement (UNPM)"<sup>157</sup> to restore multiparty democracy in the country. The intensity of the UNPM engulfed the

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<sup>150</sup> Phadnis, "The Politics of Referendum," 451.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 447.

<sup>152</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 147–148.

<sup>153</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition*, 63.

<sup>154</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 151.

<sup>155</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 63.

<sup>156</sup> Khadka, "Crisis in Nepal's Partyless Panchayat System," 453.

<sup>157</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 75.

whole nation. As a result, King Birendra invited opposition leaders to form a new cabinet. In this way, 30 years of direct rule by the monarch and the party-less Panchayat system were ended by a popular movement.<sup>158</sup>

#### **D. UNSTABLE DEMOCRACY AFTER 1990**

After the long period of absolutism in the country, the parliamentary election of 1991 changed the political equation of the country.<sup>159</sup> Thapa explains that the Nepali Congress won a majority, the Unified Marxist Leninist (UML) party became the second largest party, and the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (loyal to King) was almost eliminated, with the biggest surprise of Unified People's Front Nepal (UPFN, which later became the Communist Party of Nepal) emerged as the strong party.<sup>160</sup> Even after the 1991 parliamentary elections, however, the political parties could not put aside their respective partisan interests; rather, they continued to promote power-centered politics. As Parajulee notes, the expectations of the people and the maintenance of democratic practices were shredded away by frequent forming and dissolution the governments.<sup>161</sup>

Einsiedel, Malone, and Pradhan further maintain that the collapse of the NC-led majority government turned out to be a political misfortune for the country in 1994.<sup>162</sup> The country faced economic burdens during the mid-term election the same year. However, no political parties secured a majority in the election, and the CPN (UML), being the largest party in the parliament, formed the first elected communist government in the Nepalese history.<sup>163</sup> As a result, in the four and a half years after the mid-term election, Nepal had four unstable governments.<sup>164</sup> This situation indicated that people's demands and expectations for better lives never become the necessity of the government and political parties. In contrast, power-centered politics became the dominant factor.

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<sup>158</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 92–93.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom Under Siege*, 37.

<sup>161</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 272.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 39.

<sup>164</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 286.

Deepak Thapa illustrate that the power-centered trend was so overwhelming that just four years after restoration of democracy through the people's movement, public faith in democracy itself eroded.<sup>165</sup>

Indeed, the political parties, according to Parajulee, were so eager to either maintain their hold on power or to pull down the ruling minority or coalition government that they even sought help from the king and the Supreme Court to strengthen their position.<sup>166</sup> There was no question of government or political parties' seriousness about the genuine problems or concerns of the people, let alone institutionalizing democracy. The popular enthusiasm for democratic reform was dashed when the people's hopes for a better standard of living and solutions to Nepal's entrenched social problems remained unfulfilled.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

From 1951 to 1990, Nepal experienced many political challenges. In fact, all these challenges had one thing in common: power-centered politics that failed to deliver services to the people. Although the monarchy was strongly blamed for deteriorating the political situation of the country, political parties and their leaders also have to concede some part of blame for not being able to show leadership when it was needed. Especially after the dawn of democracy in Nepal in 1951, political parties and their leaders could neither develop solidarity among themselves for the welfare of the country nor institutionalize the democratic norms while running the government.

Monarchs used the political parties' weaknesses as an opportunity to strengthen their positions in Nepalese politics. The power-centered politics of Nepal for relatively long periods of time (even after the end of the Rana oligarchy) disrupted Nepal's social, political, and economic dimensions. In the course of all these activities, the Nepalese people and their expectations were never addressed.

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<sup>165</sup> Deepak Thapa, "The Making of the Maoist Insurgency," in *Nepal in Transition: From People's War to Fragile Peace*, ed. Einsiedel, Malone, and Pradhan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 48.

<sup>166</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition in Nepal*, 286.

The continuation of such practices eventually created a situation where the political stakeholders (mainly the king and the political parties) completely shifted their focuses from responsibility for delivering services to the people to concentrating on strengthening their political aims. As a result of a deeply entrenched people's grievance against political parties and a frustration with democracy, a revolutionary mindset developed in Nepal. Most importantly, those people who had to face social discrimination based on religion, language, and caste were increasingly prepared to side with any movement or agenda that provided them any hope to rid the country of such insufferable practices.

### III. ETHNIC GRIEVANCES IN NEPALESE POLITICS

The ethnic issue in Nepal has a long history. However, as Susan Hangen asserts, Nepal has never experienced open ethnic conflict even though it is home to more than 100 ethnic and caste groups.<sup>167</sup> The main concern of the ethnic community has always revolved around being represented in national politics. Therefore, at present, the legacy of ethnic issues in Nepal prevails more as a political problem than a social one.

Hence, while analyzing how ethnic issues emerged in national politics, this chapter highlights historical ramifications, ethnic issues in Nepalese politics, political ignorance to ethnic grievances and its possible future, and ethnic issues in Nepalese democracy. To further maintain that ethnic issues are politically driven, the interim constitution of Nepal includes clauses to ensure that there shall be equal justice, rights, and opportunity to all citizens with no discrimination:

No person shall, on the ground of caste, descent, community or occupation, be subject to racial discrimination and untouchability of any form. Such a discriminating act shall be liable to punishment and the victim shall be entitled to the compensation as provided by the law.<sup>168</sup>

Likewise, in order to uplift the social status of low caste or historically under-privileged people, the interim constitution also aspires to such points that

women, Dalit, indigenous tribes, Madheshi community, oppressed group, the poor peasant and labourers, who are economically, socially or educationally backward, shall have the right to participate in the state mechanism on the basis of proportional inclusive principles.<sup>169</sup>

Constitutional ideals notwithstanding, however, society has not easily accepted such provisions. As a result, there are many cases—mostly in remote parts of Nepal—where social exclusion of the low-caste people or ethnicities persist. Hangen provides

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<sup>167</sup> Hangen, *The Rise of Ethnic Politics*, 25.

<sup>168</sup> The Government of Nepal, Interim Constitution (2007), 8.  
<http://www.nepal.gov.np/NepalGEAPortalp=WebContent/NLC&n=InterimConstitutionOfNepal.html>

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 11.

examples that the low-caste people are not allowed to enter high-caste people's homes or share meal with them.<sup>170</sup> Furthermore, in Nepal, various ethnic groups have their own internal caste system. For example, Newars, Gurungs, Rai, Magars, and Madeshi are some of the distinct ethnic groups having their own caste system. Table 2 illustrates some of the subdivisions among the ethnic Newari.

Table 2. Religion-Based Newari Ethnicity and Its Internal Caste System<sup>171</sup>

<b>Buddhist Newars</b>	<b>Hindu Newars</b>
Gubhaju (priests)	Deo Brahman (priests)
Bare (inferior priests and gold- and silver-smiths)	Jha Brahman (inferior priests)
Sheshyo (landowners and farmers)	Sheshyo Chhathari Sheshyo Panchthari Sheshyo Charthari
Jyapu (peasants and agricultural laborers)	
Regarded as untouchable	Regarded as touchable

In the Newars' case, although various castes follow traditional Newar character, being a different caste group they also have their own norms and values. For example, the Jyapu (peasants and agricultural laborers) belonging to Buddhism do not have the same privileges and are not considered to be high-caste Newars like Sheshyo (landowners and farmers). It also signifies that it is difficult to change the deeply entrenched, age-old social practices and traditions. Because of such complexities, the ethnic and caste issues in Nepal have been always contentious.<sup>172</sup>

<sup>170</sup> Hangen, *The Rise of Ethnic Politics*, 27.

<sup>171</sup> Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, "The Inter-Relations of Castes and Ethnic Groups in Nepal," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 20, no. 1/3 (1957): 245. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/610377>.

<sup>172</sup> Hangen, *The Rise of Ethnic Politics*, 2–3.



## A. ETHNICITY IN NEPAL UNTIL 1990

Historically, Nepal's ethnic issues can be considered to reach back to the existence of Hindu mythologies. Hindu mythology was deeply integrated with social practices, which segregated people based on castes. Marie Lecomte-Tilouine illuminates the impact of Hinduism on ethnic issues and its segregation:

Hindu mythology shows that the uniqueness of the primordial being, Purusha, was broken at the creation of the universe, when his body was dismembered to create, from its different parts the classes of human being. These classes are ranked in a hierarchy according to their correspondence to various parts of Purusha's anatomy enumerated in vertical order: thus, Brahmins, who emerged from his mouth, form the highest category, Kshatriyas, who came from his chest, are ranked second, Vaishyas, who originated from his thighs, are ranked third, and last come the Shudras, who emerged from his feet.<sup>173</sup>

It was a traditional belief in Hindu religion that *purusha* (meaning "men" in the Sanskrit language, which is the original script of modern-day Nepalese), alongside the creation of Universe, were meant to perform their responsibilities based on their castes, that is, "Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, shudras, Brahmins."<sup>174</sup> These categories gave different identities to different people. For example, the Brahmins were considered to be a sacred caste, with most of them as priests. Likewise, Shudras would be considered a low-caste people like shoemakers, or blacksmiths. The lowest of the low-caste were considered "untouchable."

Untouchability refers to certain practices of the "upper" castes such as refusing to touch or share water with people who have been called the "untouchables" and who are today collectively called dalits. These sets of practices involve not only proscriptions on both groups of people but are often justified through notions of purity and related concepts.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup>Lecomte-Tilouine, *Hindu Kingship, Ethnic Revival*, 194.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid.

<sup>175</sup>Sundar Sarukkai, "Phenomenology of Untouchability," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44, No. 37, 39, <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/25663542?sid=21105755096313&uid=4&uid=2>

## 1. Ethnic Issues in Nepalese Politics

As noted by Sundar Sarukkai, Nepalese society was similarly divided into elite-caste groups and lower-caste as untouchable groups, even though society was uniformly Hindu. Likewise, as Hangen notes, even before the unification of Nepal, high-caste Hindus were already able to exert a significant level of influence in the Nepalese politics during the 18th century.<sup>176</sup> However, Nepal's ethnic issues became more pressing after 1769.

It is not an overstatement that the ethnic issues in Nepal were present at the creation of a unified Nepal. Tilouine mentions that the national unifier, King Prithvi Narayan Shah, compared Nepal to a common flower garden with four classes (Varna) and 36 classes (jat).<sup>177</sup> This poetic pronouncement was meant to unite the different castes and classes under one flag. Hangen posits that as the unification campaign started “the process of state building resulted in ethnic stratification as different groups of people were incorporated in the state on unequal terms.”<sup>178</sup> As time passed, the caste system deepened, and began to create social discrimination in Nepalese society.

In addition, because of the influence in the state's affairs, the high-caste Hindus were able to establish a good relationship with the rulers as well as being able to get benefits from the emergent state.<sup>179</sup> Therefore, Hangen writes, in Nepalese history, “the process of state formation benefited high-caste Hindus, some Newars and some other ethnic groups”<sup>180</sup>—but not all. Under these circumstances, a strong anti-regime perception among the lower-caste people prevailed even during the Shah rule in Nepal, however latent this sentiment remained in an age of extremely limited popular political activity.

Similarly, Thapa assert that the originator of Rana oligarchy rule, Jung Bahadur Rana, played an active role to promulgate the “Hindu caste system through 1854 Muluki

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<sup>176</sup> Hangen, *The Rise of Ethnic Politics*, 28.

<sup>177</sup> Lecomte-Tilouine, *Hindu Kingship, Ethnic Revival*, 82.

<sup>178</sup> Hangen, *The Rise of Ethnic Politics*, 28.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

Ain (Civil code) ... [it] divided the entire population of Nepal into a rigid social pecking order based on caste and ethnicity.”<sup>181</sup> The Rana rulers always had a focus to “institutionalize Hinduism and Nepali as the official religion and language of the state.”<sup>182</sup> In the long run, this situation marginalized other religions and languages of Nepal, and widened the rift among the various castes.

Hangen, notes that during the Rana regime, the rumble over ethnic issues in Nepal continued in the form of “cultural preservation and revitalization.”<sup>183</sup> This is how the decades-long history of conflict between specific ethnic community and the Nepali state have emerged in social and political forms.<sup>184</sup>

By the beginning of the 1900s, some events demonstrated the politicization of social discrimination in Nepal. The Limbus, who resided in hilly eastern districts of Nepal as Brown explains were concerned by the dominance of Brahmins, which were in the minority in the areas of Limbus yet controlled economy and social positions.<sup>185</sup> Hangen mentions that during 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, notably, the Newars, living in the Kathmandu Valley started various activities to promote their language.<sup>186</sup>

Likewise, Nancy Levine says, other castes like Tamang, Limbu, Rai, and Gurung had an “intrinsic and enduring identity”<sup>187</sup> in terms of their customs and languages. In 1949, another specific group from Tharus (although they live in flatland, they do not consider themselves as Madhesi) communities established *Tharu Kalyankari Sabha* (Tharu Welfare Society).<sup>188</sup> Similarly, other ethnic organizations were also established as welfare societies, like *Thakali Samaj Sudhar Sangh* (Social Reform Organisation) in

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<sup>181</sup> Thapa, “The Making of the Maoist insurgency,” 39–40.

<sup>182</sup> Thapa, “The Making of the Maoist Insurgency,” 39.

<sup>183</sup> Susan Hangen, *Creating a “New Nepal”: The Ethnic Dimension* (Washington, DC: East-West Center, 2007), 15, <http://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/handle/10125/3513/ps034.pdf>.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>185</sup> Brown, *The Challenge to Democracy*, 4.

<sup>186</sup> Hangen, *Creating a “New Nepal,”* 15.

<sup>187</sup> Nancy E. Levine, “Caste, State and Ethnic Boundaries in Nepal,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46, no. 1 (February 1987), 74, <http://www.Jstor.org/stable/2056667>.

<sup>188</sup> Hangen, *The Rise of Ethnic Politics*, 35.

1954.<sup>189</sup> Thakali, according to Menzardo and Sharma are people from Thak khola or river.<sup>190</sup> These activities demonstrate that people belonging to some particular groups or communities were concerned with preserving, if not promoting, their ethnic identity.

## **2. Ethnic Movements from 1951 to 1990**

Ethnic issues in Nepal broke through into political prominence only with the fall of the Rana regime and the beginning of democracy in 1951.<sup>191</sup> People were not only against the Rana oligarchy but also expected social welfare activities that could end social discrimination.<sup>192</sup> Even though the ethnic movements after 1951 were not so effective as to make any substantial changes in the age-old ethnic problem of Nepal, they did spur the ethnic communities to rise for their rights and freedom.<sup>193</sup>

Hangen posits that because of the awareness within ethnic community on their rights, “in the early 1950s there were acts of violence against Bahuns”<sup>194</sup> (Bahuns are Hindu-high caste) in eastern Nepal. The struggle or the violent activities of Limbus against Bahuns were considered an effort to retrieve their special land rights they had enjoyed for so many years before.<sup>195</sup> Even though the Bahun [Hindu-high caste) money-lenders were harassed and beaten, there was no large-scale violence based on the ethnic issues.<sup>196</sup>

To be sure, the ethnic issues in Nepal were politically amplified when organizations affiliated with underprivileged ethnic communities formed coalitions.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Hangen, *Creating a “New Nepal,”* 16.

<sup>190</sup> Andrew. E. Menzardo and Keshav Prashad Sharma, “Cost-Cutting Caste and Community: A Look at Thakali Social Reform in Pokhara,” *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* 2, no. 2 (1975): 25–26, [http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/contributions/pdf/CNAS\\_02\\_02\\_02.pdf](http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/contributions/pdf/CNAS_02_02_02.pdf).

<sup>191</sup> Hangen, *Creating a “New Nepal,”* 15.

<sup>192</sup> Singh, *Nepal Struggle for Democracy*, 60–61.

<sup>193</sup> Hangen, *Creating a “New Nepal,”* 14–16.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–15.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–16.

Therefore, the ethnic grievances that “challenged the hegemonic ethnic domination of the [high-caste] in state and society,”<sup>198</sup> became stronger after 1990.

## **B. ETHNIC MOVEMENTS AFTER 1990**

With the restoration of democracy alongside the downfall of party-less Panchayat system, long-neglected ethnic issues and grievances become prominent in Nepalese politics. The demands for the ethnic rights according to Hangen, emerged strongly in the form of “indigenous nationalities movement.”<sup>199</sup> Bhattachan maintain that even after the promulgation of 1990 constitution since Nepal still remained as a Hindu Kingdom, which further increased ethnic communities’ grievances against the government as “ethnic and region-based organizations and political parties continued to pursue their demands.”<sup>200</sup> Such a situation occurred because in Hindu religion nothing has changed as far as the discriminatory activities toward lower-caste Hindus and non-Hindus was concerned. For example, both the lower-caste Hindus and non-Hindus would not be allowed to enter any Hindu temple

Thus, in practice, as Lawoti notes, the ethnic communities like Dalits, Janajatis (indigeneous people), and Madeshis (people living in flatland or madhesh), who experienced social inequalities and discrimination for long periods of time, did not see any considerable changes in their position even after 1990.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Mahendra Lawoti, “Ethnic Politics and the Building of an Inclusive State,” in *Nepal in Transition: From People’s War to Fragile Peace*, ed. Einsiedel, Malone, and Pradhan (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 129.

<sup>199</sup> Hangen, *The Rise of Ethnic Politics*, 37.

<sup>200</sup> Krishna B. Bhattachan, “Ethnopolitics and ethnodevelopment: An emerging paradigm in Nepal” in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nepal: Identities and Mobilization after 1990*, ed. Mahendra Lawoti and Susan Hangen (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 39.

<sup>201</sup> Mahendra Lawoti, “Evolution and growth of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal” in *The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Revolution in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mahendra Lawoti and Anup Pahari (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 10–11.

## 1. Dalits

As Anita Shrestha writes, Dalits are the low-caste Hindu people.<sup>202</sup> In Nepal's total population Dalits are believed to comprise 13.09 percent.<sup>203</sup> While Dalits are dispersed nationwide, the majority of them reside in the middle hills and some in the flatland as well. Lawoti and Hangen assert that Damai (tailors), Kami (smiths), Sarki (leatherworkers), and Gandharba (minstrels) are the most prominent Dalits.<sup>204</sup>

The discrimination against Dalits was so high that their physical touch was regarded as misfortune to persons, animals, or even belongings of high-caste people. In the past, the practice of social boycott was common against Dalit men and women in Nepal. For example, if a Dalit girl would marry a high-caste man or vice-versa,<sup>205</sup> the couple would be excluded from the society and also from their families. If a family did not shun the couple, the family also faced exclusion and discrimination.

Today such practices are illegal in Nepal, but there are places where the boycott still happens. At present, if a Dalit would walk in to the temple or be a part of any religious ceremony or a Dalit girl or boy would marry high-caste boy or girl, they may be socially ignored even though politically such actions are punishable.<sup>206</sup>

## 2. Indigenous Groups or Adhibasi Janajatis

Indigenous groups (*Adhibasi Janajati* in the Nepalese language) have a huge say in the issue of ethnicity in Nepalese politics. Lawoti note that the indigenous groups represent separate culture, castes, and religion.<sup>207</sup> Among many Tamus, Magars, Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Tharu are some of the prominent castes among indigenous groups of

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<sup>202</sup> Anita Shrestha, "Dalits in Nepal: Story of Discrimination," *FOCUS* 30 (2002), 1, <http://lighthousenepal.org/about/dalit-caste.pdf>.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Steven Folmar, "Problems of identity for Hill Dalits and Nepal's nationalist project," in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nepal: Identities and Mobilization after 1990*, ed. Mahendra Lawoti and Susan Hangen (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 87.

<sup>205</sup> Shrestha, "Dalits in Nepal."

<sup>206</sup> The Government of Nepal, Interim Constitution (2007), 8.

<sup>207</sup> Lawoti, "Ethnic Politics," 130–31.

Nepal.<sup>208</sup> These people are scattered all over the country. Besides, Newars and Tharus, most of other castes live in the hill districts of Nepal.

### **3. Madheshi**

Madeshi are the people living in the flatland of Nepal also known as Madhesh or Terai, who share language, culture and traditions with the people from North India.<sup>209</sup> Krishna Hachhethu maintains that the Madhesh begins from Siwalik” hill range, and Madesh identity is mostly used for people in that region.<sup>210</sup> Furthermore, he states that there is no documented “Pan-Madesh identity” in terms of culture, religion and language.<sup>211</sup> For this reason and other social conventions, some Janajatis group like Tharu do not prefer to be recognized as Madeshis although they reside mostly in the flat lands of Nepal.<sup>212</sup>

### **C. POLITICAL DISREGARD OF ETHNIC GRIEVANCES**

Hachhetchu argues that, with the political shift in 1990, the ethnic communities demanded more inclusion, better representation, and a more responsive central government.<sup>213</sup> Likewise, Hangen asserts that ethnic communities wanted the state to “recognize and support their cultural diversities.”<sup>214</sup> However, because all the parties were new to democratic practices, and because of the overwhelming focus on party politics, political parties could not address the issue of ethnic grievances. The continued prevalence of suppressed people, groups, and languages in Nepal remained key to the deterioration of ethnic issues in Nepalese politics that further provoked ethnic grievances. Table 3, from the World Bank, illustrates this point.

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<sup>208</sup> Lawoti, “Ethnic Politics,” 134.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>210</sup> Krishna Hachhethu, “Madheshi Nationalism and Restructuring the Nepali State,” paper presented at a seminar on Constitutionalism and Diversity in Nepal, organized by Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, 2007, 4.

<sup>211</sup> Hachhethu, “Madheshi Nationalism,” 4.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>214</sup> Hangen, *Creating a “New Nepal,”* 16.

Table 3. Dimension of Exclusion in Nepal<sup>215</sup>

Social category status	Gender	Caste	Ethnicity/Race	Language	Religion	Geo-political
Dominant	Men/Boys	Tagadhari Brahmin Chettris	Caucasoid	Nepali	Hindu	Parbatiya (Hill Dwellers)
Subordinate	Women/girls	Dalit	Janjati Or Mangoloid	Other	Non-Hindu	Madehsi (Plain Dwellers)

Almost none the governments formed from 1991 to 1994 could satisfy the demands of ethnic communities. Deepak Thapa explains that even though political parties campaigned on promises to improve the conditions of people, especially the ethnic communities, “there was no improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the people.”<sup>216</sup> Anne Sales recounts that not even a single candidate representing any ethnic communities won an election held between 1991 and 1994.<sup>217</sup>

This situation could have given the wrong impression to other political parties that besides indigenous people, the majority of the population did not consider ethnic issues as a crucial agenda item for the country. Sales maintains that people were more interested in solving their social necessities (food, health, education, etc.) than in indulging in ethnic issues for their own sake.<sup>218</sup> However, almost all the political parties outlined their concern for respecting cultural diversity of ethnic communities and giving special rights for their preservation in their respective party’s manifesto.

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<sup>215</sup> The World Bank, Department for International Development, “Unequal Citizens: Gender, Caste, and Ethnic Exclusion in Nepal,” <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTSOCIALDEV/Resources/3177394-1168615404141/NepalGSEASummaryReport-part1.pdf>.

<sup>216</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 55.

<sup>217</sup> Anne de Sales, “The Kham Magar Country, Nepal: Between Ethnic Claims and Maoism,” in *Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal*, ed. Deepak Thapa (Kathmandu: Martin Chautari, 2003), 71.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.



When the major parties like the NC and the CPN (UML) came to power, however, their manifestos were never executed on ground.<sup>219</sup> After 1990, political ignorance of issues related to ethnic grievances continued for several years in Nepalese politics. Hence, a separate analysis on the political ignorance to Dalits, Janajatis and Madeshes gives clear reasons to understand as to how their grievances against the ruling system kept on increasing.

### **1. Disregard of Dalit Issues**

As opposed to the promises given to the Dalits for improving their conditions, almost all the political parties after 1990 did not do much to on this regard. The representation of Dalit's in the parliament was either zero or negligible.<sup>220</sup> Hence, Folmar note that all political parties offered fish to the Dalits but gave them frog in reality—meaning that Dalits were promised political inclusion but in fact they continued to face discrimination.<sup>221</sup> Such discrimination and the ignorance of political parties for not to include any Dalits in the cabinet from 1990 to 2002 increased Dalits' grievances.<sup>222</sup>

### **2. Disregard of Janajatis**

For decades the resentment of indigenous groups existed over the issue of an unequal distribution of state facilities as well as representation of their castes. David Gellner ascertains that because Nepal did not have reservation facilities like in India, it could not equally offer opportunities (most importantly education) and share developmental facilities to the under privileged people living in different parts of the country.<sup>223</sup> Gellner further suggests that the government facilities would be offered to people who had traditionally enjoyed either high-caste status like Brahmins and Chettris or some “principally high-caste elite group even from indigenous group like Newars.”<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Parajulee, *The Democratic Transition*, 290–292.

<sup>220</sup> Lawoti, “Ethnic Politics,” 140.

<sup>221</sup> Folmar, “Problems of identity for Hill Dalits,” 85.

<sup>222</sup> Lawoti, *The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal*, 10.

<sup>223</sup> David N. Gellner, “Caste, Ethnicity and Inequality in Nepal,” *Economics and Political Weekly* 42, no. 20, <http://www.jstor.org>.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

Therefore, the issue of Janajatis or indigenous has become contentious as all Janajatis settlers did not migrate in Nepal at the same time, some castes like Tamangs are new settlers compared to other nonindigenous castes like Brahmins and Chettris.<sup>225</sup>

### **3. Disregard of Madeshi People**

The Madhesi people always felt isolated by the ruling system and discriminated in terms of their culture, ethnicity and language. Bandita Sijapati illustrate that as the “strong sense of collective deprivation experienced by Madhesis helped form the basis of their mobilization as an identity group,”<sup>226</sup> the political ignorance of their problem was fueling their grievances against the ruling system.

According to Monica Dastider, at some point people from the hills started to settle in the plain terai for better living, yet they were recognized as Pahades (people from hills) not Madeshis.<sup>227</sup> The Madhesis always felt they were not treated as well as Pahades. This sense of rivalry persisted permanently in the hearts and minds of the Madeshi people against the Pahades and eventually accumulated in the form of Madeshis grievances. Hence, the Madeshis have tendency of counting “Pahades” as only settlers in the plain areas, and thus will not give them enough space to let Pahades feel as part of Madeshi communities.<sup>228</sup>

Still, the Madhesh ethnic issue never surfaced, until there was an overwhelming political movement behind it. According to Hachhethu, one of the prominent results of the political party’s failure to address the ethnic grievances of Nepal was reflected during the 21-day Madesh uprising, in 2007.<sup>229</sup> The Madesh uprising is the first uprising in

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<sup>225</sup> Hangen, *Creating a “New Nepal,”* 19.

<sup>226</sup> Bandita Sijapati, “In Pursuit of Recognition: Regionalism, Madeshi Identity and the Madhes Andolan,” in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nepal: Identities and Mobilization after 1990*, ed. Mahendra Lawoti and Susan Hangen (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 155.

<sup>227</sup> Monica Dastider, “Refusing to choose : The Muslim Madhesis and the coexistence of religious and regional identity in Nepal’s Terai,” in *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nepal: Identities and Mobilization after 1990*, ed. Mahendra Lawoti and Susan Hangen (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 174–176.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Hachhethu, “Madeshi Nationalism,” 2.

Nepalese history that was overwhelmed with the demand for establishing ethnic rights in Madhesh. Another important aspect of this uprising is that it took place during January–February 2007 a year after the Comprehensive Peace Accord between the government and the Maoist rebels, which ended 10-year-old Maoist insurgency in Nepal. Sijapati argue that the Madheshi, through the Madhesh movement, advocated for recognition not just for representation of their ethnicity.<sup>230</sup>

According to Hachhethu, the significance of Madhesh uprising was that after second people's movement overthrew the direct rule of the monarch in 2002, governance arrangements offered some benefits to Janajatis, women, and Dalits, but they granted nothing in the case of Madheshis.<sup>231</sup> Therefore, Sijapati highlights that through the Madhesh uprising, the Madeshis wanted to establish their position in the Nepalese Politics, as “authors of legislative processes not simply addressees of the law.”<sup>232</sup> Thus, during the Madhesh uprising, activists demanded that all of Madhesh be recognized as autonomous region, rather than asking only for the political recognition of their problem.

The Madesh uprising showed that even the end of insurgency in 2006 could not do much to reduce the grievances of Madheshis toward the ruling system. Furthermore, the uprising also hinted that a reform of the system or regime itself is not sufficient to pacify people's aspirations and grievances. In fact a concrete plan, tangible benefits and efforts should be in place to avoid any conflict, agitation or uprising. Likewise, the uprising also pointed that political ignorance to ethnic grievances for longer period of time could result into sever uprising.

In the long run, these varied and entrenched grievances would turn into frustration, which remains prone to get either easily swayed or to be exploited by the radical reform agenda of the political parties. In the past because of such ethnic grievances in the Nepalese politics, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) easily grabbed the opportunity and waged insurgency.<sup>233</sup> Therefore, the long disregard of

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<sup>230</sup> Sijapati, “In Pursuit of Recognition,” 155.

<sup>231</sup> Hachhethu, “Madeshi Nationalism,” 9–10.

<sup>232</sup> Sijapati, “In Pursuit of Recognition,” 155.

<sup>233</sup> Lawoti, “Evolution and growth of the Maoist,” 11–12.

political parties of the ethnic grievances proved costly to Nepal's social, political and economic domain and could again emerge if politically, the issue of ethnic grievances will not be addressed correctly.

#### **D. ETHNIC GRIEVANCES IN THE FUTURE**

The continuation of political disregard of the ethnic problems in Nepal can again create an environment for new violence. Compared to other parts of Nepal, it is especially vulnerable to erupt in the context of Madhesh or Terai region. As Terai shares a porous open border with India, cross-border violence is frequent. These probabilities will be extremely precarious if they are further fueled by Madhesh ethnic issues.

Most importantly, as Anurag Acharaya asserts that even after the Comprehensive Peace Accord ended the decade-long Maoist insurgency; many armed outfits have sprung up in Madhesh.<sup>234</sup> One of the reasons, according to Rameshwar Bohora, could be that many were doing so to “get back at the Maoists for their actions during the decade-long insurgency.”<sup>235</sup> Hence, the question remains what would happen if the ethnic grievances of people living in various part of the country would follow the course of violence to make the state listen their never solved problem.

Therefore, if the ethnic grievances of the people are not timely addressed then another violent activity will occur in the name of revolution, and insurgency. According to Bhattachan, failing to address such ethnic grievances the country might face another ethnic movement in the form of “reform or revolution.”<sup>236</sup> However, the ethnic issues cannot be seen only from negative perspectives because this issue somehow has helped to strengthen the Nepalese Democracy as well. Unlike in the past, because of various ethnic movements, the ethnic issues have been pertinent in Nepal's present day politics.

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<sup>234</sup> Anurag Acharaya, “No War no Peace” *Nepali Times*, April 15- 21, 2011, <http://nepalitimes.com/news.php?id=18108#.VPXa9a85A5s>

<sup>235</sup> Rameshwar Bohora, “Maoist Insecurity,” *Nepali Times*, March 19–25, 2010, <http://nepalitimes.com/news.php?id=16899#.VG2EIK8tAic>.

<sup>236</sup> Bhattachan, “Ethnopolitics and ethnodevelopment,” 49.

## E. CONCLUSION

The ethnic issues of Nepal and the movements associated with them have never put forth their demands in a violent way. The formation of various political wings especially after 1990 has given the forum for the people to speak out their grievances. Hangen maintains that because of these kinds of forums, and the continuous political and intellectual pressure over the ethnic issues, the government of Nepal in 2002 established “official definition of adibasi janajati through the National Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN).”<sup>237</sup> This foundation allowed the NFDIN to regulate its voice regarding ethnic groups in national affairs.

For the consolidation of democracy such forums always serve as platforms to incorporate differences and allow people to try to find solution remaining in within the democratic setup of the country. In a country like Nepal, which has various cultural, traditions, and languages, such peaceful practices definitely will help to establish a trend of looking to solve the problem through democratic manner.

Nepal’s early history has incorporated the different dimensions of ethnic issues in terms of culture, religion, and tradition. In the past Nepal was isolated from outside world. It was ruled by various monarchs, and Ranas who preferred to keep Nepal isolated so that their rule would not be challenged with the democratic aspiration of people. Therefore, the issue of ethnic grievances never surfaced in the national politics of Nepal. Because of such isolation and lack of people’s awareness, it would have been possible that at the beginning emerged more as social issues than the political one. As a result social discrimination to lower-caste people was severe in the society. The hierarchical caste system in terms of caste, religion and language started to become complex. The people belonging to the lower-caste not only suffered to bear social discrimination but also were compelled to feel as unequal citizens of same nations.

The discrimination that increased ethnic grievances however, never got transformed into a social problem and the country never had to face ethnic conflict. However, ethnic issues and grievances started to get politicized over the course of time

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<sup>237</sup> Hangen, *Creating a “New Nepal,”* 15.

and started to become the contentious issue in the national politics. Especially, after the restoration of multiparty democracy, the interim constitution included special clause to address the ethnic grievances. However, irrespective of those constitutional clauses the ethnic communities continued to face discrimination resulting to further deepen the grievances. The Maoist insurgency amplified the ethnic issues. Because of this, the interim constitution of Nepal in 2007 included clause that would consider any discrimination based on castes, religion, and language as punishable.

#### IV. THE MAOIST MOVEMENT AND ETHNIC GRIEVANCES

Especially in the context of political instability, rampant corruption, ineffective government and excessively power-centered party politics, Nepalese people's resentment against the political parties reached an apex after 1990.<sup>238</sup> According to Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, this situation contrasted with the people's aspirations after the restoration of democracy in 1990.<sup>239</sup> People regarded political parties and the leaders as opportunists.

As Thapa and Sijapati posits, the marginalized and downtrodden people always felt like second-class citizens, and expected fair treatment from the center.<sup>240</sup> Similarly, Hari Roka mentions that the Nepalese people did not see any serious commitment and actions on the part of the political parties including a leftist party such as CPN (UML) to solve their problems.<sup>241</sup> With the growing resentment toward the political parties, people were losing hope and trust in democratic parties as well. This discontent spelled the biggest loss for all the political parties of Nepal but one: the CPN (M). Therefore, the Maoist movement played a crucial role, as Michael Hutt notes, in changing the political and social dynamics of Nepal.<sup>242</sup>

The CPN (M) exploited the weaknesses of political parties, and was able to garner the sympathy of marginalized people. According to Saubhagya Shah, initially the Maoists tried to persuade people with their social reform agendas' and advocated to establish the rights for the marginalized people.<sup>243</sup> Therefore, although people belonging to various ethnic groups were not joining the Maoist movement, many of them were either

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<sup>238</sup> Lawoti, "Evolution and growth of the Maoist insurgency," 7–11.

<sup>239</sup> Pfaff-Czarnecka, Joanna, "High Expectations, Deep Disappointment," in *Himalayan People's War: Nepal's Maoist Rebellion*, ed. Michael Hutt (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 166.

<sup>240</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 55–56.

<sup>241</sup> Hari Roka, "The Emergency and Nepal's Political Future," in *Himalayan People's War: Nepal's Maoist Rebellion*, ed. Michael Hutt (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 257.

<sup>242</sup> Michael Hutt, *Himalayan People's War: Nepal's Maoist Rebellion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 1–2.

<sup>243</sup> Saubhagya Shah, "The Other Side of the Alcohol Economy," in *Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal*, ed. Deepak Thapa (Kathmandu: Martin Chautari, 2003), 133–34.

supporting or recognizing the Maoists' agendas. Politically, they made for an important gain of the Maoist party.

#### **A. COMMUNISM AND MAOISM IN NEPAL**

In 1949, Pushpa lal Shrestha, Niranjana Govind Vaidya, and other notable leftist leaders formed the Communist party of Nepal (CPN) in Kolkata (India) on July 1949.<sup>244</sup> However, R. Nickson asserts that the impact of Communist ideology in Nepalese politics began with country's quest for democracy in 1951.<sup>245</sup> For a small landlocked country like Nepal, which shares an open border with India and whose economy is heavily dependent on its larger neighbor, communism should not have resonated.

It is often argued that the Communist influence in Nepal increased after it decided to open a road network with China in 1963. According to PR Pradhan, refuting the allegation that he allowed communist influence in Nepal, the late King Mahendra delivered a speech saying "communism will not come to Nepal by riding a vehicle."<sup>246</sup> In fact, in Nepal's case, compared to China, an open border with India and the communist movement in its northern states (most importantly the Naxalite communist rebels in West Bengal) can be considered to be an influential factor for the rise of Communist ideology. Upreti, highlights the significant influence of communism in the Nepalese politics:

The rise of the communist movement in Nepal is contemporary to the rise of organized political activities and political parties in the country. Another important aspect is that like the Nepali congress, the Communist party of Nepal also emerged in the Indian soil. The Indian National Movement along with various social reforms that took place in India from time to time provided the necessary background for the emergence of organized political activities in Nepal.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Upreti, *Maoists in Nepal*, 15.

<sup>245</sup> Nickson, "Democratization and the Growth of Communism," 3–4.

<sup>246</sup> P. R. Pradhan, "Some Legends about King Mahendra-2," People's Review, <http://www.peoplesreview.com.np/index.php/articles/those-were-the-days/item/282-some-legends-about-king-mahendra-2>.

<sup>247</sup> Upreti, *Maoists in Nepal*, 15.



According to Lawoti, historically, the Communist parties in Nepal have chronic problem of “factionalism and frequent splits.”<sup>248</sup> Furthermore, Upreti recounts that the conflict of CPN with the centrist party like the Nepali congress party started when it opposed the “New Delhi agreement concluded between the Nepali Congress, Ranas and Monarchy.”<sup>249</sup>

The CPN opposition to the agreement signifies that it wanted drastic change in the Nepalese politics as opposed to the compromised moderate change adopted by the Nepali Congress Party. Upreti maintains that even during that time, some members of the CPN agreed to go into a protracted war to the complete political change in the country, while some of the party members wanted to side with the democratic forces.<sup>250</sup> This situation denoted two political implications. First, the difference of opinion over the issue of governing models had a distinct line between CPN and other democratic parties (especially the Nepali Congress) immediately after country’s independence. Second, there were hardline and moderate leaders within the CPN party, and they had differences over party policies. Upreti further posits that at times there were communists who despite their ideology would support every move of the royal palace, termed as Royal Communists.<sup>251</sup> Likewise, Lawoti assert that after 1990, communist party, like the CPN (UML) that formed the first democratically elected communist government,<sup>252</sup> was considered as a moderate communist party. In contrast, Upreti notes that there were hardline Communists who would want to revamp the old system rather than tackle the genuine social and political transformation in the country.<sup>253</sup>

In general, Nepalese political history shows that communist parties were divided over their ideological stands over different periods of time. Lawoti asserts that when communism was declining from world politics, communists in Nepal were able to

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<sup>248</sup> Lawoti, “Evolution and growth of the Maoist,” 5.

<sup>249</sup> Upreti, *Maoists in Nepal*, 15.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>252</sup> Lawoti, “Evolution and growth of the Maoist,” 5–6.

<sup>253</sup> Upreti, *Maoists in Nepal*, 23.

establish themselves as major political force.<sup>254</sup> There may be various reasons for it but bad governance, disregard of people's grievances, and extremely unstable and power-centered politics can be commonly considered a main source of the problem.

## **B. GENESIS OF THE MOVEMENT**

The restoration of multiparty democracy in Nepal in 1990 provided a chance for various political parties to exercise their activities. Continuing with the trend of many breakaways and unity among the different communist parties of Nepal, CPN (Fourth Congress), CPN (Mashal) led by Prachanda, and CPN (Masal) led by Baburam Bhattari formed the hardcore communists' center under the name of CPN (Unity Center)/United People's Front Nepal.<sup>255</sup> The party impressively won nine seats in the 1991 parliamentary elections. Thapa argues that as the Party Manifesto of CPN (unity center) had opposed the constitution and multiparty democracy, its participation in the election was viewed as its strategy to "gain a platform to 'expose' the inadequacy of the parliamentary system."<sup>256</sup>

Lawati posit that the strategy of the CPN (UC) became more explicit when it formed the CPN (Maoist) and "decided to begin armed insurgency."<sup>257</sup> However, one of the difficulties for the CPN (M) was to establish themselves as a radical communist party with strong social-reformist agendas unlike other communist parties. But according to Sudheer Sharma, to the CPN (M) dismay, it was also considered "one of the dozens of communist parties that existed in Nepal."<sup>258</sup> Moreover, the government was not serious about their movement. Sharma goes on to say that the negligence on part of the government was so much that even after the Maoists declared people's war, the then home minister claimed of bringing Maoist "activities under control within four or five

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<sup>254</sup> Lawoti, "Evolution and growth of the Maoist," 5–6.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>256</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 37.

<sup>257</sup> Lawoti, "Evolution and growth of the Maoist," 7.

<sup>258</sup> Sudheer Sharma, "The Maoist Movement: An Evolutionary Perspective," in *Himalayan People's War: Nepal's Maoist Rebellion*, ed. Michael Hutt (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 38.

days.”<sup>259</sup> Sharma however mentions that as the insurgency intensified by 2001, “every word that came from Prachanda attracted tremendous interest and speculations amongst all the sections of Nepali Society.”<sup>260</sup>

Likewise, before starting their insurgency, the Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai submitted a 40-point conditional demand to then Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba.<sup>261</sup> Singh mentions that out of many demands, three core demands were the base line of the CPN (M) i.e., Interim Constitution, Constitutional Assembly election, and Republic Nepal.<sup>262</sup> In contrast, the government did not even look at the demands before it flatly denied them. Deuba, after six years of Maoist insurgency, as Singh describes, was “finding it tough to find way of negotiation with the rebels.”<sup>263</sup>

This point in Nepalese politics is often analyzed as the failure by the then-government to prevent the insurgency. Therefore, there is always a question in Nepalese politics: Had the government listened to the Maoist problem, would the Maoists have given up insurgency? For various reasons, it was unlikely that Maoists would have done so. However, it would have been impossible for the Maoists to continue the insurgency had state timely addressed issues related to people’s aspirations, and ethnic issues.

According to Thapa, the CPN (M) realized that as marginalized people’s sentiments were rising, and politically the government was unstable with less socioeconomic reform, it was the right time for them to use the people’s grievances to achieve their political goal.<sup>264</sup> The CPN (M) as a political party always wanted to establish as a strong party with their popular demands. The above analysis hints that in any situation the insurgency would have taken place in Nepal. However, if the

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<sup>259</sup> Sharma, “The Maoist Movement,” 49.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>261</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 53.

<sup>262</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 269–72.

<sup>263</sup> Sharma, “The Maoist Movement,” 38.

<sup>264</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 74–78

governments at the time had seriously considered the Maoist 40-point demands,<sup>265</sup> then the Maoists would have had less reason to start the insurgency.

## **1. Buildup**

The Maoist movement that began on February 13, 1996, from six hilly districts of Nepal, according to Singh, was able to spread their influence to almost all the country within the short period of time.<sup>266</sup> They deftly used the political instability of the country from 1996 to 2001. Hutt mentions that on one hand, this was considered a crucial period for the CPN (M) as they used all their options—military, social, and political strategies—in the insurgency.<sup>267</sup>

On the other hand, politically this period turned out to be most volatile in Nepalese politics with frequent change of governments. As a result, all those frequent changes in the government during that period made political parties extremely unpopular among the people. Exploiting the failure of all these political parties, Singh maintains that the CPN (M) utilized strong political rhetoric, which was effective to mobilize people's aspirations (mostly ethnic community people) against the state.<sup>268</sup>

This plan of initiation of the people's war would be based on the principle that everything is an illusion except state power. While remaining firm on the principal aim of the armed struggle as to capture political power for the people, the Party expresses its firm commitment to wage relentless struggle against all forms of deviationist thoughts and trends including economism, reformism and anarchism.<sup>269</sup>

Thapa explains that the Maoists intensified their guerilla activity by attacking police posts in remote areas and seizing weapons and ammunitions.<sup>270</sup> At the beginning of their insurgency, the Maoists in a way played a sly game by keeping the Nepalese

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<sup>265</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 189.

<sup>266</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 268.

<sup>267</sup> Hutt, *Himalayan People's War*, 5–6.

<sup>268</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 277.

<sup>269</sup> Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists), "Theoretical Premises for the Historic Initiation of the People's War" (September 20, 1995), <http://ucpnmaoist.org/PageDetails.aspx?id=340&cat=4#.VG-ainnwsdU>.

<sup>270</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 7.

Army out of their way at least until the time they felt they were strong enough to fight against them.<sup>271</sup> Hence, without any fear of stern military action against them, the Maoists attacked the poorly armed and trained police force whose primary responsibility was to maintain law and order rather than fighting the insurgents. The government's late decision to mobilize the Army against the insurgents is also seen as the mistake that let Maoists to get militarily strengthened.

Thapa goes on to say that the CPN (M) used the template of the Chinese People's war to continue their insurgency, that is, "strategic defense, strategic balance and strategic offence."<sup>272</sup> Sharma recounts that in Maoist ideology, if the rebels can withstand the enemy's strategic offence to continue their insurgency it is considered a strategic defense.<sup>273</sup> Likewise, he posits that the doctrinal viewpoint of strategic balance would see both rebel and the government force at par in terms of fighting strength.<sup>274</sup> Similarly, in strategic offence the rebels would overwhelm the government forces and force them into strategic retreat.<sup>275</sup> Thus, the CPN (M) divided its insurgency into various different plans.

All the slogans in one way or another reflected the political power that intended to address people's grievances. Therefore, these phases have significant political implications on Maoist insurgency.

- **First Plan:** This phase was meant to establish the Maoist's agenda in the populace so that they could convince the people that their agenda is focused to address people's problems and grievances. Thapa quotes as saying their political slogan, "Let us move ahead on the path of the people's war to establish the new people's democratic state by destroying the reactionary state."<sup>276</sup>
- **Second Plan:** Thapa claims that during this phase the Maoists even conducted local elections with the aim of establishing "anti-feudal and anti-imperialist [people's government]."<sup>277</sup> In fact, this was crucial in

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<sup>271</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 113–116.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>273</sup> Sharma, "The Maoist Movement," 51.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 99.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>277</sup> Deepak Thapa, *Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal* (Kathmandu, Nepal: Martin Chautari Center for Social Research and Development, 2003), 214.

gaining the support of people especially ethnic communities who were suppressed by limited feudals in the villages.

- **Third Plan:** The third plan lasted from June 1996 to June 1997.<sup>278</sup> Sharma maintains that during this time, the government tried desperately to quell the Maoist movement and launched a police operation named “Kilo Sierra Two.”<sup>279</sup> Singh affirms that this operation was seen by many villagers as a “state terrorism unleashed by the police ... lit the spark for an expanding insurgency.”<sup>280</sup> There were enormous reports of police brutality, misbehavior, extortion in almost all the villages where the operation was conducted. Such situation infuriated people (especially ethnic communities) to the extent that they were more inclined to Maoists agendas that advocated for establishing people’s rights and developing people’s lives. Hence, it can be noted that in contrast to the Government’s expectation, operation Kilo Sierra Two, instead of quelling the Maoists increased Maoists influence and it helped Maoists to use people’s grievances.
- **Fourth Plan:** After reaching this phase, Maoists were able to convince rural peasants that if they did not revolt for their rights then the state would adopt a repressive operation like Kilo Sierra Two. As a result, many rural youths felt necessary to establish their strongholds. According to Thapa, to this end, they created the slogan of “advance in the great direction of creating base areas.”<sup>281</sup> Besides actively running their program inside the country, for the first time the political wing affiliated with the Maoists alongside the support of some Indian political organizations, which took out a rally in New Delhi, India in 1998.<sup>282</sup> It was one of their moves to spread their influence in international communities as well.
- **Fifth Plan:** This plan was in many ways a follow up of the fourth plan, which also reiterated to build up their base areas.
- **Sixth Plan:** Sharma argues that with the slogan raise to new heights the guerrilla war and the people’s resistance struggle, this was one of the important phases of Maoists plan as they militarily attacked various police outposts, and confiscated weapons and ammunitions.<sup>283</sup> The plan lasted from July 2000 to February 2001.

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<sup>278</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 101.

<sup>279</sup> Sharma, “The Maoist Movement,” 52.

<sup>280</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 286.

<sup>281</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 101.

<sup>282</sup> Sharma, “The Maoist Movement,” 51.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

According to Prem Shahi, after completing different phases, the CPN (M) decided to transform its ideology, naming it as “Prachandapath,”<sup>284</sup> under its supreme leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, alias Prachanda. (*Prachanda* in the Nepali language means “gigantic and terrifying.”) It was viewed as a part of a psychological motive to deter the other political parties and the security forces and to attract people. Thapa asserts that the Prachandapath to some extent changed the dynamics of the Maoist insurgency as it started to document the party’s ideologies.<sup>285</sup> Furthermore, the Maoists’ attack on the Army barracks on November 2001 led the government to declare state of emergency.<sup>286</sup> In 2002, the parliament was dissolved and “fresh elections called amid political confrontation over extending the state of emergency.”<sup>287</sup> The political crisis in Nepal deepened after the emergency.

The Maoists not only relied on their guerilla warfare but, as Upreti points out, they also maintained their ‘dialogue strategy’<sup>288</sup> with the government and also with other democratic parties. The Maoists wanted to convince their supporters (especially ethnic communities), cadres, the broader Nepalese people, and also the international communities that they were not just focused on insurgency but also equally committed to negotiations and talks.

## **2. The Dialogue and Ceasefire Tactics**

During the ten years of insurgency, there were two rounds of peace talks and ceasefire, in 2001 and 2003. Upreti asserts that the Maoists used the tactics of “fight and dialogue with the government at the same time,”<sup>289</sup> borrowed from Shining Path rebels of Peru. One of the reasons for Maoists to come to negotiations could be that they wanted to prove to their cadres that they are loyal to their agendas. Likewise, as Thapa mentions,

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<sup>284</sup> Prem Shahi, “Prachanda: The Mastermind behind the Maoist Insurgency in Nepal” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2010), 24.

<sup>285</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 113.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>287</sup> BBC, “Nepal Profile.”

<sup>288</sup> Upreti, *Maoists in Nepal*, 69.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 15.

the Maoists wanted to prove to other political parties that they were different from all the other democratic parties including the left parties.<sup>290</sup>

In addition, Singh posits that after the royal massacre in 2001, when many members of the royal family, including the king and the queen, were gunned down, allegedly by the drunken crown prince over the issues of his choice of marriage partner, the influence of the palace in Nepalese politics become meager.<sup>291</sup> He further mentions that the Maoists had the leverage of accepting dialogue opportunity that gave them time to rearrange their strength.<sup>292</sup>

**a. First Round of Peace Talks**

As Upreti highlights, the first round of peace talks that was held on August 30, 2001, was not successful as neither negotiating party had a specific and clear agenda.<sup>293</sup> Furthermore, he goes on to say that Prachanda and the secretary of CPN (UML), Madhav Nepal met at Siliguri, India, where Prachanda's "proposal of constituting a Constituent Assembly"<sup>294</sup> was denied by the CPN (UML).

As the first round of talks ended on November 21, 2001, Thapa points out that there was massive surge in Maoist Violence alongside the political instability in the country.<sup>295</sup> He further notes that the Maoists made the condition that they would sit for the dialogue with the government only if the government adhered to their demands on "Constituent Assembly election, Republic Nepal and the interim constitution."<sup>296</sup>

**b. Second Round of Peace Talks**

Although the Maoists were never serious about peace talks, they participated in the second round of peace talks on January 2003. The second round of talks compared to

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<sup>290</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 167–169.

<sup>291</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 295.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Upreti, *Maoists in Nepal*, 116.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 121.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 120.



the first round was more active in terms of political movements.<sup>297</sup> In this period the government and the Maoists agreed on not using force against each other and observed complete ceasefire.

The Maoists benefitted particularly from the talks. Upreti notes that the release of some Maoists from jail and the confinement of the then-Royal Nepalese Army's movement to within a five-kilometer radius from their specific camps were some examples of their achievement.<sup>298</sup> However, there was no substantial improvement on the talks and thus it could not produce any positive result to solve the insurgency problem. As a consequence, the Maoists declared an end to the seven-month ceasefire, blaming the government for not taking the peace talks seriously.<sup>299</sup>

The peace talks during the insurgency cannot be evaluated just as a means to settle the problem but also as evidence that the Maoists were able to engage the government in their strategy. The Maoists were clear on the outcome of the peace talks as they knew that the government and the parliamentarian parties would not accept their proposal, thus by and large, the Maoists were determined to use the peace talks as a tool to gain their political objective.<sup>300</sup>

According to Upreti, politically, the Maoists were able to establish their position as a party that was seeking major changes on social, economic and political front—not just the government.<sup>301</sup> This development was the biggest blow to all other democratic parties who had been wrangling for decades about reforming and bringing down the government. The use of the dialogue strategy by Maoists gained tremendous support from the people, mainly the ethnic communities.

Thapa posit that the Maoists continuously attracted ethnic communities by raising their expectations on uplifting their living standards and by convincing them to establish

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<sup>297</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 167.

<sup>298</sup> Upreti, *Maoists in Nepal*, 122.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 123–124.

<sup>300</sup> Thapa, *A kingdom under Seige*, 178.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 122.

their political rights in the state.<sup>302</sup> The Maoist movement was much more effective in the villages as there was no presence of government officials after the beginning of the insurgency. Singh maintains that in all these events that were unfolding from 1990, the people's grievances against the government, the social elites, and also against the social discrimination based on language and ethnicity was in the apex.<sup>303</sup> For this reason, the Maoist agenda on ethnic demands garnered the support of this large group of marginalized people.

### C. MAOIST ETHNIC DEMANDS

Before beginning their insurgency, the Maoists submitted their 40-point demands to the then-prime ministers, which included several social welfare demands. Thapa notes that many of those demands were almost identical to the political commitments of centrist parties like the NC and CPN (UML).<sup>304</sup> The other parties considered such demands as only a part of their election campaign. The demands had different political connotations for the Maoists—and their followers. According to Thapa, some of the salient points of the 40 demands raised the expectations of marginalized ethnic communities.

Discrimination against downtrodden and backward people should be stopped. The system of untouchability should eliminate. All languages and dialects should be given equal opportunities to prosper. The right to education in the mother tongue up to higher levels should be guaranteed. Regional discrimination between the hills and the tarai should be eliminated. Backward areas should be given regional autonomy. Rural and Urban areas should be treated at par. All racial exploitation and suppression should be stopped. Where ethnic communities are in the majority, they should be allowed to form their own autonomous governments. Patriarchal exploitation and discrimination against women should be stopped. Daughters should be allowed access to paternal property.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Thapa, "The Making of the Maoist Insurgency," 49.

<sup>303</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 275.

<sup>304</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 53.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 190–94.

The ethnic community, which always considered itself as deprived citizens was, inclined toward the Maoists' agendas because of their commitment to the marginalized people's problems. Upreti points out that as the ethnic community makes up 37.3 percent of the population, their favor toward the Maoist's agenda was crucial to lift the intensity of the Maoists movement.<sup>306</sup>

Lawoti explain that the Maoist party, which started the "campaign against the caste system and ethnic prejudice and resisted imposition of compulsory Sanskrit in Schools, a language alien to most indigenous groups,"<sup>307</sup> seemed to be more involved in the issues of ethnic communities. According to Singh, this is how the Maoists successfully exploited "mood of discontent to their advantage by promising the Nepalese people a better future."<sup>308</sup> In fact, each of the Maoist strategies carefully incorporated agendas that would reflect people's grievances. The CPN (M) craftily used social, economic, and political fora to disseminate their agenda among these populations.

### **1. Social Agenda**

One of the CPN (M) social reform agenda items was the use of land. According to Thomax Cox, the land rights issues in Nepal demonstrates that there have been always conflict between "dominant high-caste Hindus and some ethnic minorities"<sup>309</sup> over the issue of land ownership. Madhav Joshi and T. David Mason mention that even the electoral democracy in 1990 could not provide "relief from clientelist dependency"<sup>310</sup> to the minorities. They further assert that as the disparity of "poorest 40 percent of agricultural households control[ling] only 9 percent of cultivatable land, while the

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<sup>306</sup> Upreti, *Maoists in Nepal*, 79.

<sup>307</sup> Mahendra Lawoti, "Ethnic dimensions of the Maoist insurgencies," in *The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Revolution in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mahendra Lawoti and Anup Pahari (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 142.

<sup>308</sup> Singh, *Nepal: Struggle for Democracy*, 273.

<sup>309</sup> Thomas Cox, "Land Rights and Ethnic Conflict in Nepal," *Economic and Political Weekly* 25, no. 24/25 (June 16–23, 1990): 1318. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4396401>.

<sup>310</sup> Madhav Joshi and T. David Mason, "Between Democracy and Revolution: Peasant Support for Insurgency versus Democracy," *Nepal Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 6 (November 2008): 781, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27640768>.

wealthiest 6 percent of landowners control[ing] more than 33 percent of farm land”<sup>311</sup> remained same even after governments land reform legislation in 1990, people’s (mostly ethnic minorities) grievances continued to increase.

The CPN (M) correctly utilized this situation to their advantage. One of their platforms regarding the use of land according to Thapa was that “land should belong to ‘tenants’ [and] land under the control of the feudal system should be should be confiscated and distributed to the landless and homeless.”<sup>312</sup> He further mentions that such agendas raised the expectations of marginalized people. Similarly, the Maoists’ advocacy for the end of social discrimination, and reservation rights for the people was equally effective among the ethnic communities.<sup>313</sup> Likewise, he posits that ethnic communities demanded Nepal be declared a secular state and also demanded respect for indigenous languages, as Nepali was the national language.<sup>314</sup>

Similarly, the Maoists’ popular ban on gambling and alcohol was another prominent campaign. According to Shah, the banning of alcohol garnered public support in reducing domestic and social violence.<sup>315</sup> He further observes that before the Maoists’ ban, the government was ignorant about the aspects of social crimes and corruptions related to the alcohol industries.<sup>316</sup> Thus, the CPN (M) was able to exploit the popular desire of general public who wanted either to control or ban alcohol. Similar to the CPN (M) social reform agenda their economic reform agenda was also able to attract ethnic communities’ sympathy for their insurgency.

## **2. Economic Agenda**

After the 1990 multiparty democracy, the Nepalese people were over-ambitious to improve their economic conditions. In contrast, it was believed that the political parties

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<sup>311</sup> Joshi and Mason, “Between Democracy and Revolution,” 766.

<sup>312</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 192.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Shah, “The Other Side of the Alcohol Economy,” 133.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

did not even have any “plan or program ready at hand to fight for in order to meet the aspiration of people,”<sup>317</sup> according to BBC. Moreover, in comparison to other communities, marginalized people did not see any substantial changes in their lives before and after 1990. This fact raised their grievances against the government in particular and against the democracy in general. Thapa posits that the CPN (M) demanded that the “poor farmers should be exempted from the loan repayments.”<sup>318</sup> This exemption would include the farmer’s loan from government banks as well. The CPN (M) also sought “fixed wages to the workers in industries, and agriculture,”<sup>319</sup> a popular agenda among these constituents.

In a country where much of the population depends on agriculture and where the bulk of poor peasants come from the ethnic communities (with huge debts to land owners and money-lenders mostly from high-caste Hindus), such economically viable agendas of the CPN (M) would have been crucial in attracting ethnic community. The influence of the Maoist economic agenda among the ethnic communities was such that even after the government announced its “special economic programme to improve the living conditions of the country’s twenty-five least developed districts,”<sup>320</sup> the attraction of marginalized people’s affiliation to Maoist’s economic reform agenda did not change at all. This use of ethnic grievances was another achievement for the CPN (M) towards attaining their political goal.

### **3. Political Agenda**

According to Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, the disenchantment of the people for the lack of development and the change they were expecting after restoration of democracy in 1990 was so high that they felt the political movement only changed the regime but not

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<sup>317</sup> “Nepal’s Misunderstood Movement,” *BBC News*, June 4, 2006, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/5034468.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/5034468.stm).

<sup>318</sup> Thapa, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 193.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>320</sup> “Economic Programme for Nepal’s Least Developed Districts,” *BBC News*, October 30, 1998, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/204771.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/204771.stm).

the system.<sup>321</sup> In general, people's dissatisfaction over the party politics, corruption, nepotism, and frequent government's changes was defamed the significance of democracy. This general resentment on part of the people provided right time for the CPN (M) to inject their radical political agenda.<sup>322</sup>

Thapa mentions that while the Maoists agenda was popular among the people, the government's decision to use force to suppress the Maoist movement resulted in "the killings of Maoists and their supporters—as well as civilians caught in the middle—[and] escalated to unprecedented heights."<sup>323</sup> According to Sharma, ironically, on many occasions "innocents far outnumbered Maoist rebels."<sup>324</sup> This situation created huge mistrust of the police force. Thapa notes that in 2001, when a nationwide opinion poll was conducted, about 30 percent believed that the Nepal police force was responsible for the increased number of Maoists in the country because of their unprecedented brutality during the operation.<sup>325</sup> It was a great bonus for the CPN (M) to reinforce their convictions to the people that fighting against the state is the only means to establish the people's government that will take care of their grievances.

Under such circumstances, Upreti asserts that "the Maoists as political strategists tried to in-cash the conditions in order to move further for the attainment of their political objectives."<sup>326</sup> Furthermore, Thapa maintains that one of the Maoists' political commitments to attract innocent and marginalized people, reflected in their 40-point demands, was the release of the people who were "arrested extra-judicially for political reasons"<sup>327</sup> during police operations.

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<sup>321</sup> Pfaff-Czarnecka, "High Expectations," 169–170.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>323</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 92.

<sup>324</sup> Sharma, "The Maoist Movement," 49.

<sup>325</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 92.

<sup>326</sup> Upreti, *Maoists in Nepal*, 49.

<sup>327</sup> Thapa and Sijapati, *A Kingdom under Siege*, 191.

#### **D. MAOIST FAILURE TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM**

The CPN (M), after coming to mainstream politics, made good impressions on the ethnic communities as people had huge expectations from the CPN (M), considering it as a true revolutionary party. The result of the 2008 constituent assembly election surprised many people. The former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who was an election observer, called the election results “a total transformation in the form of government from a 240-year-old Hindu monarchy to a democratic republic.”<sup>328</sup>

The Maoists also insisted on their commitment to democracy and later did form the government, shifting from a party in movement to a party in power. However, the Maoists’ actions during their nine-month stay in the government completely diverged from the revolutionary ideologies they held during 10 years of insurgency. In contrast, the Maoists, too, were actively involved in power politics like other parties. This fact led the people to see the Maoists’ real intent of coming to power, which further made them unpopular among the people.

A party that waged ten years of insurgency, aiming to bring drastic social, political and economic change, failed to “strike a chord with ordinary people across the country,”<sup>329</sup> states the BBC. Then the Maoists ignored the grievances of ethnic minorities who were crucial for their victory in the 2008 election. Following their failure to provide “radical policies for a country renowned for its conservatism and tolerance,”<sup>330</sup> the Maoists suffered a humiliating defeat in the second constitution election in 2013.

According to Joshi and Mason, it was surprising to many that the party that was able to “mobilize peasants for armed insurgency ... could not mobilize them to vote for them in democratic elections.”<sup>331</sup> Many political analysts believe that the Maoists’

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<sup>328</sup> “Nepal’s Maoists Lead Poll Count,” *BBC News*, April 12, 2008, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7341944.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7341944.stm).

<sup>329</sup> “Nepal’s Maoists Digest Impending Electoral Wipe-out,” *BBC News*, November 21, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-25034461>.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>331</sup> Joshi and Mason, “Between Democracy and Revolution,” 765–82.

strategy to use people's grievances to attain political goals cost them dearly in the 2013 second constitutional election.

An analysis from Muma Ram Khanal, a former central member of the Maoist party during the conflict, explains the Maoist defeat:

It is true that secularism, federal republicanism, and the formation of a Constituent Assembly were mainly Maoist agendas which won support of the people in 2008 because voters thought that these would bring peace. But after seeing the arrogance of the Maoists in power, voters figured out that the promises were just slogans. Maoist supporters and ex-fighters who had sacrificed all, had been wounded or suffered during the conflict asked: "What was it all for?" They had seen the party leadership siphon off allowances and compensation meant for them and the elections provided the perfect opportunity to exact revenge.<sup>332</sup>

Hence, when the CPN (M) failed to deliver on the promises given to the ethnic communities during insurgency, the people vented their anger in the election against the Maoists. The Maoists in a way were boomeranged by the same ethnic grievances, which formerly had elevated their political status.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The restoration of multiparty democracy in Nepal in 1990 aroused many expectations among the people. However, as party politics dominated national politics, the social, economic, and political problems further deepened and were sidelined. This development fueled frustration on the part of the people and, most importantly, of the marginalized ethnic communities.

This was the situation of Nepalese politics when the Maoists started their insurgency. In the beginning, the right use of ethnic grievances backed by popular social reform agendas worked for the Maoists. Even after joining mainstream politics, people believed that the Maoists would deliver their promises. Because of this belief, the Maoists' journey from bullet to ballot was impressive. However, when they were in the government, they could not fulfill the expectations and promises they had given to the

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<sup>332</sup> Muma Ram Khanal, "Post-Mortem of a Defeat," *Nepali Times*, November 29–December 5, 2013, <http://nepalitimes.com/regular-columns/Inside-Out/Post-mortem-of-a-defeat,201>.



ethnic communities. The CPN (M), like other democratic political parties, easily got swayed by a mismatch between ideology and practice. As a result, the CPN (M) not only lost the election but also lost its image of being a revolutionary party. This defeat was considered a political failure of the Maoists.

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## V. CONCLUSION

Nepal's ethnic animosities seem to have begun alongside its unification. According to Prayag Raj Sharma the old code of 1854, which created a "four-fold classification of society,"<sup>333</sup> was further deepened when the Hindu religion came into play in politics and society. The religion further segregated castes into touchable and untouchable categories. Such discrimination not only irked ethnic communities, but raised their grievances to an apex.

However, those discriminatory practices were sublimated, if not completely changed, once the Maoists blended ethnic grievances into their violent movement. Having raised the issue of ethnic rights and grievances, the Maoist party emerged as the messiah for the downtrodden and under-represented ethnic people. Especially in the villages, some of the Maoists' radical movements such as banning of alcohol, forcible entry of untouchables into the temples and also into the houses of elites or touchable persons, and confiscation of land property, transferring it from landowners to land users, established them as a true revolutionary party.

Under these circumstances, the Maoists effectively used ethnic grievances and achieved their intended political goals by becoming the largest party in the country's first constitutional elections in 2008. However, their journey from rebels to major political stakeholders could not last long, once the population (most importantly, ethnic communities) realized that their past revolutionary practices completely mismatched their power-centered political activities. The Maoists strayed from their promised ideological commitment, which maintained that their "armed struggle will be conducted by taking agrarian revolution as the axis and by relying on the laboring masses, particularly the poor peasants."<sup>334</sup>

In addition, the party claimed that it would "never and under no circumstances succumb to the pressures, threats and enticements of the internal and external reactionary

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<sup>333</sup> Prayag Raj Sharma, "Nepal: Hindu-Tribal Interface," *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* 6, no. 1 (1978), 4.

<sup>334</sup> Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists), "Theoretical Premises."

forces.”<sup>335</sup> As a result, underrepresented and downtrodden ethnic communities who trusted the Maoists’ political agenda in the past reversed their support and voted them out in the 2013 second constitution election. The Maoists’ political strategy to use ethnic grievances for their political goals caused them to lose central gravity from the national politics. In fact, the rise and fall of the Maoist party in Nepalese politics left some concerns regarding the contentious issues of ethnic grievances that are still unresolved.

One of the significant aspects of the Maoist movement in Nepalese politics is that, unlike in other parts of the world, this problem entered country’s politics after the restoration of democracy in 1990. Normally, the people or political parties revolt either to bring or restore some specific form of political change, as opposed to the Maoist party, which participated in parliamentary elections, and afterwards walked out to wage their movement. The Maoist party that impressively won nine seats in the 1991 parliamentary election resorted to a violent movement.

So the concern arises: Was there a built-in fault line in Nepal’s democracy that could not accommodate various political parties’ parliamentary practices? In some ways, the answer is yes, as the parties could not fully overcome the long-practiced power-centered politics. Politically, these concerns enable the democracy to get further strengthened if past mistakes are corrected in the present.

Historically, the continuation of power-centered politics in Nepal (among the King, NC, and CPN [UML]), even after 1990, frustrated the people’s aspirations in general and riled ethnic communities in particular. Under such circumstances, if not the Maoists, some other politically ambitious parties or groups would likely have begun some form of extremist activities. Such a volatile situation proves that there was the built-in fault line of Nepal’s democracy, which, instead of changing the system only changed the political players, that is, from king to political leaders. Similarly, when the Maoists submitted their 40-point social reformist agenda to the government in 1995, the then prime minister from the Nepali Congress completely failed to tackle the situation. This incident also signifies the incapacity of leadership to rightly understand the problem.

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<sup>335</sup> Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists), “Theoretical Premises.”

Given the existing power-centered politics, and the weaknesses of political leadership, chances are slim that political parties would be able to resolve ethnic grievances. Even the Maoists who put ethnic grievances at the forefront of their struggle did not uphold their promised ideological stance after coming to power. Thus, it becomes less promising that other parties who did not make any changes on ethnic grievances, despite their frequent stay in power since 1990, would resolve the problem. Therefore, solving ethnic grievances under the current political environment seems bleak and uncertain for governments in future.

As enormous problems regarding development, and other issues besides ethnic grievances, were stalled during the Maoist movement, it would not be easy for any government to aim to achieve sustainable peace, stability, and development in the coming years. Furthermore, as the issues of ethnic grievances have now become the main political agendas for various political parties, conflict of ideology and practice of power-centered politics to fulfill party interests remain crucial. The friction between those who want radical changes, like the Maoists, and those who want sustainable moderate changes, like the Nepali Congress, seems to continue in Nepalese politics.

In the bigger picture, Nepal's Maoist movement remains a good case study for countries that have issues related to ethnic identity. The Maoist movement reveals how ethnic grievances can determine Nationalism. In other words, there can be one nation, one flag; yet a separate identity among different ethnic communities is necessary to maintain national unity. If the country fails to maintain a balance, then a country may face a severe conflict like that of Nepal.

In sum, even though Maoists used ethnic grievances to attain political goals, they brought in the invisible, but crucial issues of ethnic grievances into the national political limelight. Their movement in one or another way influenced other major political parties to rethink and change their political courses of action, that is, from power-centered politics to national politics. This point can be considered the major impact of the Maoist movement on Nepal's political environment. Finally, at present, where the political stagnation over the issue of ethnic communities and grievances still remains unclear and

unresolved in Nepalese politics, a sustainable political approach is required to solve the issues: a vital task to execute in Nepalese politics.

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